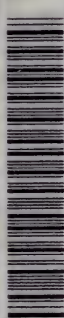


THE REVIVAL  
OF RELIGION  
IN ENGLAND  
IN THE  
EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY

JOHN S. SIMON



3 1761 02087264 4

758  
85  
EMMANUEL



THE LIBRARY  
of  
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY  
Toronto

n. Gumboldt 193





The 37th Fernley Lecture

THE  
REVIVAL OF RELIGION  
IN ENGLAND  
IN THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY  
JOHN S. SIMON

THIRD THOUSAND

London  
ROBERT CULLEY

2 CASTLE ST., CITY ROAD, AND 26 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

OK  
758  
55

EMMANUEL

102614  
SEP 19 1966



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. RELIGION . . . . .	1
II. THE SOCIAL CONDITION OF ENGLAND . . .	44
III. THE MORAL CONDITION OF ENGLAND . . .	74
IV. THE RELIGIOUS CONDITION OF ENGLAND. . .	96
V. THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES . . . . .	124
VI. THE DAWN OF THE REVIVAL IN WALES. . .	132
VII. THE DAWN OF THE REVIVAL IN ENGLAND . . .	150
VIII. THE REVIVAL IN ENGLAND . . . . .	200
IX. SOME RESULTS OF THE REVIVAL . . . . .	273



# THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION IN ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## I

### Religion

**C**HARLES KINGSLEY, in his *Village Sermons*, affirms that the Bible says hardly anything about religion; that it never praises religious people. It talks of God, and tells us not to be religious, but to be godly. He points out that it speaks of 'a religious man only once, and of religion only twice, except where it speaks of the Jews' religion to condemn it, and shows what an empty, blind, useless thing it was.'<sup>1</sup> Kingsley's statement has that touch of exaggeration in it which attracts attention; but there can be no doubt that the distinction he indicates exists, and it is essential that we should remember it. Especially must it be borne in mind when dealing with the subject of the 'Revival of Religion.' We must determine from the outset whether we are to

<sup>1</sup> p. 13.

## 2 The Revival of Religion in England.

use the word 'religion' in a superficial or a profound sense. If we employ it in the former, then we may be led into mere descriptions of advance in the elaboration of creeds and the ceremonies of worship; if in the latter, we must go down into the hidden deep of man's moral and spiritual nature and watch those revolutions of thought and feeling which result in a new life brought into loving accord with the perfect will of God. It is in its deeper sense that we use the word when speaking of 'The Revival of Religion in England in the Eighteenth Century.'

The student of the development of the Christian religion is aware that, in the teaching of Christ and His Apostles, we see the triumph of the spiritual over the ecclesiastical and ceremonial view of religion. The triumph cannot be understood without some knowledge of the struggle, and the record of the struggle is to be found in the Old Testament. In that book we see the elaborating of a system of ceremonial worship which, finally, became a burden that crushed the spiritual instincts of the Jewish people. In watching the tragedy, it is a relief to find that the tyranny of mere religiousness was assailed by men who knew that the direct service of God in their spirit was something altogether different from service through an intermediary priest at an altar or in a Temple. It is not necessary to dwell at any length on such familiar illustrations of the fact as Samuel's words to Saul, 'Hath the Lord as great delight in



burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams' (1 Sam. xv. 22); or the statement in the Book of Proverbs, 'To do justice and judgement is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice' (Prov. xxi. 3); or the assurance of the Psalmist, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise' (Ps. li. 17). There are two passages, however, in Jeremiah which bring a ceremonial and a spiritual religion into sharp contrast, and which throw a stream of light upon the great controversy which was closed by Christ's emphatic words to the woman of Samaria. Let us pause for a few moments to consider Jeremiah's significant statements.

Jeremiah, speaking in the name of God, says: 'I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you' (vii. 22, 23). In this passage we think it is clear that Jeremiah teaches the great truth that, in the original intention of God, the religious life of man was to be ethical and spiritual, and that the system of sacrifices was to be subordinate to the regnant idea. Sacrifices only served their purpose when they assisted to educate men into a life of

## 4 The Revival of Religion in England

obedience. The supreme object of ceremony and teaching was to create in worshippers and disciples a heart that loved God, a heart that absolutely submitted to His will. Unfortunately, they failed to accomplish their purpose. Jeremiah, in the chapter from which we have quoted, depicts the failure of the ceremonial system. He was directed to stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and to confront the crowds that flocked to the Temple. He stops the way of those who were streaming towards the altars with words that must have startled them. He cried: 'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your own hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land I gave to your fathers, from of old even for evermore' (vers. 3-7). There you have the ethical note; not a word of sacrifices, or of the benefits arising from the performance of a correct ceremonialism. The subject of sacrifices comes into view, but it kindles the prophet's indignation. He has watched the men burning incense to Baal; he has seen the children gathering wood, the fathers kindling the fire, the women kneading the

dough, the making of the cakes to the queen of heaven, the pouring out of drink-offerings to other gods. And now these idolaters come into the Temple, thinking that the Holy One of Israel may as well be remembered, and that no harm will be done if they also give something to Him. 'No,' cries the prophet, 'He can do without your sacrifices. The time is coming when He will sweep the Temple and all its altars away. They are merely instruments with which He has sought to teach you the obedience you have failed to learn. They have become a hindrance to you. As the house in Shiloh has been destroyed, so will He do to this house that is called by His name. Everything shall vanish that blinds your eyes to the fact that obedience is the gift and sacrifice with which God is well pleased.'

In the estimation of Jeremiah, obedience to the will of God occupies the supreme place in the religious life. We may well ask him how this habit of obedience is to be formed. We get his answer. In the thirty-first chapter of his prophecy there is a declaration of the profoundest meaning. He says: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord. But this is the covenant that

## 6 The Revival of Religion in England

I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more' (vers. 31-34).

Dean Plumptre, in commenting on the words 'they shall teach no more every man his neighbour,' says—

We trace in that hope for the future the profound sense of failure which oppressed the mind of the prophet, as it has oppressed the minds of many true teachers since. What good had come of all the machinery of ritual and of teaching which the law of Israel had provided so abundantly? Those repeated exhortations on the part of preachers and prophets that men should 'know the Lord,' what did they present but the dreary monotony as of an 'old worm-eaten homily'? To know Him as indeed He is, required nothing less than a special revelation of His presence to each man's heart and spirit; and that revelation was now, for his comfort, promised for all who were willing to receive it as the special gift of the near or distant future which opened to his view in his vision of the restored Israel.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, that epistle in which the kingdom which cannot be shaken comes into view, we see that the 'New Covenant' takes its place among permanent facts. There, as in Jeremiah's



prophecy, we find 'the machinery of ritual and of the teaching of the law,' having fulfilled their purpose, wax old and vanish. The verdict of the later writers of the Old Testament is endorsed by the Evangelists and Apostles—the 'machinery' had failed to make men know God, had failed to make them obey Him. In the day of Christ a new method is to be employed. Reliance is to be no longer placed on ceremony and homily. The experience of the forgiveness of sins is to lead to the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God is to lead to perfect obedience to the divine will.

The knowledge of the forgiveness of sins is the resonant note of the Church of the New Covenant, and that note was sounded by the men who heralded and conducted the Evangelical Revival. Mr. Gladstone, in the remarkable article he contributed to the *British Quarterly Review* of July, 1879, emphasizes this fact. He describes the 'Evangelical Movement' of the eighteenth century as 'a strong, systematic, outspoken, and determined reaction against the prevailing standards both of life and preaching.' He says—

It aimed at bringing back, on a large scale, and by an aggressive movement, the Cross, and all that the Cross essentially implies, both into the teaching of the clergy and into the lives as well of the clergy as the laity.

Mr. Gladstone was right. 'The bringing back of the Cross!' That is the secret of the success of the Church of the New Covenant. The secret lay hidden,

## 8 The Revival of Religion in England

through dismal ages, in the teaching of Jeremiah, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in the letters and work of St. Paul; it was discovered at last by the men who stirred the conscience of England in the eighteenth century, when myriads of sorrowing people were led into the joyous experience of the forgiveness of sins.

When we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, and consider the descriptions contained therein of the Jewish and Gentile Pentecosts, we wonder that the Church should have so completely forgotten that the 'forgiveness of sins' preludes the deep experiences of the Christian life. The Gentile Pentecost occurred in Caesarea, in the house of Cornelius. St. Peter was the missionary. When he returned to Jerusalem he gave an account to them 'of the circumcision' of the incidents connected with his preaching to the Gentiles. Describing the effects of his preaching, he said, 'As I began to speak the Holy Ghost fell on them, even as on us at the beginning.' What was he speaking about when the power of the Spirit of God descended on his audience? We have the words he was uttering: 'To Him bear all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins' (Acts x. 43). Some of those who listened to St. Peter's 'apology' must have been moved as the voice of memory spoke of a similar experience, especially when he went on to say, 'If then God gave unto them the like gift as He did also unto us, when we believed



on the Lord Jesus, who was I, that I could withstand God?' (Acts xi. 15-18). Criticism was hushed by the recollection of the supreme hour when they also received their baptism of fire.

The revisers of the New Testament have laid us under a great obligation by the change they have introduced into a sentence spoken by St. Peter to the Caesarean critics. The A.V. says: 'Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus,' but the R.V. tells us that the gift came 'when' they believed on the Lord Jesus. The change leads us to mark the time and the reason of the descent of the Spirit. The gift came in consequence of their believing 'on' the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, it came when those who were gathered together in the upper room believed on Christ for the remission of their sins.

'The remission of sins': that is the trumpet-note that sounds clearly through the morning air of every great revival. There is no true revival in which that note is not predominant. When the 'joyful news of sins forgiven' is published and believed, then follows the renewal of the heart by the might of the Spirit of God. Upon the new heart the new law is written, the law which gathers up all commandments into one: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength; and thy neighbour as thyself.'

It has been abundantly demonstrated that the

## 10 The Revival of Religion in England

way into the new life lies through the keen and full apprehension of the fact of the forgiveness of our sins. We shall be met at this point by some who will ask us to account for the ineffectiveness of Churches which give prominence in their formularies to the doctrine of forgiveness. Every church that uses the Apostles' Creed has proclaimed through the centuries, not only by the lips of its priests, but also of its people, that it believes in the forgiveness of sins. Why then has not the Church always been in a state of revival?

The answer to the question we have suggested is not difficult to give. The words 'I believe' may be used in a great variety of meanings; may be uttered with an extraordinary difference of emphasis. In the Apostolic age belief was a mighty force of mind, heart, and spirit that led a man into immediate contact with God, and that contact filled him with a divine life. But the subsequent history of the Church has shown that men have emptied the word 'believe' of its force. It has come to pass that men say that they believe who scarcely exercise their mind when pronouncing their creed. A man may say, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty,' and may be a practical atheist. If we were to accuse him of atheism, he would be indignant. He does, in a kind of a way, believe in God, but he is so insulated by worldliness that he is cut off from the divine Presence. He may, spell-like, use the shibboleths of his creed, but their use never

brings to him a single gleam of the light and glory of the Eternal God.

The ineffectiveness of the act of believing is not the only reason why Churches which possess correct formularies concerning the forgiveness of sins fail to reform the world. It is a melancholy fact that the Church has obscured, by its teaching, the doctrine of pardon; a doctrine which, in the life of Christ, is set before us with beautiful simplicity. In the words and actions of our Lord we have a revelation of the movements of the divine Mind, the love of the divine Heart. It is intensely interesting to watch Christ as He deals with sorrowful sinners. How swift is the relief He gives them! We do not now speak of the cleansing of the leper, or the raising of the dead; we speak of the gracious celerity with which He lifted the burden of sin from the conscience of a weeping woman or a palsied man. 'Thy sins are forgiven thee!' What a wealth of love and beauty and power lies in each word of that sentence! When it is spoken we can see the eager and astonished look, and then the answering joy in the eyes of those who listen to the words, 'Go in peace.' Such a revelation of the methods of the divine forgiveness ought not to have been misread. Why have we had such wearisome discussions on the possibility of the assurance of the pardon of sin? Why have we wasted so much time in doubting the reality of 'instantaneous conversions'? Our discussions have run along lines fatally afflicted

## 12 The Revival of Religion in England

with modernity; they have not led us up to the methods of Christ. With thankfulness we say that a change is impending. One of the healthiest signs of the times is the tendency to make direct appeals to Jesus Christ on all questions that concern the salvation of men. The successors of the evangelists who brought back the Cross and planted it in the churches of England welcome that appeal. We do not fear Christ's decision on the question of the forgiveness of sins. Let us consult Him. He must speak the last word in the controversy that has dragged its slow length along the dark centuries. We shall have to hear that word soon. Why should we not hear it now?

When we turn from the Master to His Apostles we pass from noonday to twilight. But the dimmer light comes from the sun; and in it we see facts concerning the great doctrine of the forgiveness of sins which harmonize with those which are revealed in the life of our Lord. We have dwelt upon the teaching of the Apostles concerning the gift of the Spirit. We have seen that in Apostolic days, when a man believed on the name of Christ for the remission of sins, he received the Holy Ghost. Belief was an individual act, the contact of a man's own soul with his Saviour, and, as a result of belief, there was a direct communication of the Spirit's influences to him without the intervention or permission of an apostle. When the apostle had preached, his work was done. He had spoken words whereby the man might be saved. Then he



stood aside, and the believer, exercising faith in the crucified Christ, realized the great experience of forgiveness.

If the simplicity of the doctrine of forgiveness, as it appears in the life of Christ and His Apostles, had been preserved, then the constant experience of pardon would have energized the Church throughout the ages. But it is a melancholy fact that the stream of pure teaching concerning the forgiveness of sins was disturbed soon after it flowed from its source; and it is to be regretted that the disturbance arose from the misuse of words which the Master Himself had spoken.

Those words are to be found in Matt. xvi. 19, Matt. xviii. 18, and John xx. 23. In Matt. xvi. 19, Christ, in addressing St. Peter after his famous declaration of faith, says: 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' In Matt. xviii. 18, in speaking to His disciples, Christ uses practically the same words He addressed to St. Peter: 'Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' In John xx. 23, after His resurrection, speaking again to His disciples, He says: 'Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose sins ye retain, they are retained.' We have now before us the three passages which have

## 14 The Revival of Religion in England

been employed by certain sections of the Church to mar the simplicity and effectiveness of the great doctrine of pardon.

The words of the Lord Jesus to St. Peter have been used to build up the astounding claims of the Church of Rome to a supremacy over all other sections of the Christian Church. On this point it is enough to say that whatever may be the meaning of the 'keys' and 'binding' and 'loosing,' it is certain that the power 'to bind and loose' belongs to the other disciples as much as to St. Peter. We may, therefore, concentrate our attention on the second passage from St. Matthew. If we look at it in its connexion we see what Christ means. He is dealing with a sin which has been committed against a man by a 'brother'—that is, a fellow Christian. In such a case these directions are given: 'Go, shew him his fault between thee and him alone; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be



done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them' (vers. 15-20).

Only a person prejudiced in favour of some theory of the necessity of priestly absolution can have sufficient ingenuity to pervert the simple meaning of these words. They evidently refer to the misunderstandings and quarrels which arise among Christian people. Immediately after the twentieth verse comes the question of St. Peter: 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?' Let us remember Christ's answer, and the parable of the two servants that follows. How does that parable end? 'His lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also My heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts' (vers. 34, 35). The directions, which have been so misapplied, concern the manner in which we are to treat offences against ourselves. 'Every one' has not only the right, but is bound to exercise the right, of forgiving his brother. This right is possessed not only by the individual, but by the church, or the 'congregation,' as the word stands in the margin of the R.V. Not only so. The right is also possessed by two or three persons who have gathered together in Christ's name. It is impossible to discern in these plain words concerning the settlement of private disputes any warrant for the doctrine that a 'priest'

## 16 The Revival of Religion in England

possesses the exclusive authority to absolve people from sins committed not only against each other, but against God.

When we turn to the incident recorded in St. John's Gospel, we find ourselves unable to detect the presence of the absolving priest. Look at the circumstances. The company to which the risen Saviour revealed Himself was an assembly of His disciples. It was not made up exclusively of apostles. Indeed, Thomas was absent, and did not receive, as an apostle, the power to forgive sins, if that power was conferred by the words of Christ on this occasion. To the assembled disciples, having breathed on them, the Saviour said: 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.' It is clear that these words run along the lines of the declaration in St. Matthew. Whatever may be their meaning, they were not spoken to a small section of the Church, but to the Church in full assembly.

We have seen that the great change which comes to a man, and which we call his salvation, is preceded by the act of divine pardon. That act is accompanied by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit conveys the intelligence of forgiveness to the penitent soul, and, as a consequence, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. The love of God being shed abroad, creates the new life in the soul; and, from that moment, the man who has believed in Christ and has

been filled with the love of God enters upon the experience of salvation. The supreme worker in this great change is God, and He acts directly upon the individual by the sole agency of His Holy Spirit. Looking through the records of the Apostolic age, the teaching and the facts reported are all consistent with this simple but profound theory of the process of salvation.

It would have been well if the Church had never confused the teaching on the subjects of conversion and salvation. But, unfortunately, such confusion has occurred, and it persists. We have seen that the doctrine of forgiveness has been misstated and perverted. The same melancholy fate has befallen the doctrines which concern the beginning, the maintenance, and the perfecting of the life of God in the soul of man.

No one who has read the history of the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic age will fall into the delusion that, in those periods, the Christian Church presented a picture of perfection. The Pauline epistles guard us against that mistake, and the facts recited by such writers as Harnack and von Dobschütz still further save us from error. But, notwithstanding the spots and wrinkles which disfigure the Early Church, one thing is certain. Up to the middle of the second century we do not find any teaching concerning the sacraments such as we now hear from the Roman Catholic Church and from the lips of High Anglicans.

Baptism in the Ancient Church was a sign that

## 18 The Revival of Religion in England

in the estimation of the person who administered it, its subject was already a believer. It was a rite which set forth, as in a picture, the death and burial of the old self and the rising of the new self to the divine and Christian life. It was not to regenerate a man that he was baptized; he was baptized because he was regenerated. There can be no doubt that, under the solemn circumstances of the baptismal service, there came upon the believing candidate a special effusion of the Holy Spirit's influences. But that was because, during the administration of the rite, he exercised a larger faith in Christ, and claimed the blessings symbolized by the sacrament. We do not find, in the first and second centuries, that the Church held that unconscious infants are changed into the reconciled children of God by sprinkling. It was only after the Church set up priests, who yearned to possess the magical powers of pagan rivals, that a doctrine was introduced which has blinded the minds of Christian people to the manner in which God, by the agency of the Spirit, regenerates the heart of a believing man.

The first error compelled a second. The comparatively modern doctrine of 'Baptismal Regeneration' is now accompanied by extraordinary teaching concerning the life-giving and life-sustaining power of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is one of the most distressing facts in Church history that the simple acts of breaking bread and drinking wine in remembrance of the death of Christ should have been so used as to lose their



primitive and beautiful significance. Indeed, such has been the fatal perverseness of the ecclesiastical mind that these simple acts have become barriers in the way of a sinner's approach to Christ. It is with sadness that we think of the black clouds of superstition that have curtained the sacred feast. It is with bitter shame that we remember the persecutions that have assailed and destroyed conscientious Christian people who have affirmed that spiritual view of the Eucharist which was in the mind of its first Administrator, and which was held by those who, in the early days of the Church, trod in His steps.

Let us be just to the Ancient Church. Whatever may have been its intellectual and moral defects, it was not under the dominion of the priest; it was not the teacher of sacerdotal doctrines. It is fortunate for us that in *The Teaching of the Twelve*, so strangely discovered in the library of the Jerusalem Monastery of the Most Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople, a record has been preserved concerning the Eucharist which shows that, in its celebration, there was no taint of the doctrine which has done so much to obscure the means whereby God effects the salvation of men. Originally, the Eucharistic service was an act of worship, and, especially, it was a thanksgiving service that followed the evening meal. It was celebrated with simplicity, and with brief prayers and ascriptions of praise to God. If we search *The Teaching of the Twelve*, the oldest Church manual we possess, we do

## 20 The Revival of Religion in England

not find any mention of a sacrificing priest, of the change of the elements, of the imparting of spiritual life by the mere taking of the bread and wine. There can be no doubt that, in those early assemblies, when the Church met with one accord in one place and celebrated its lovefeast and its Eucharistic service, there were longing eyes that wistfully looked for the Lord, loving lips that whispered, 'What think ye, that He will not come to the feast?' Nor was the 'real presence' denied them. Assisted by the symbols and the circumstances of the sacrament, by an individual act of faith the spiritual worshippers found that the Saviour was with them; as surely with them as He was with His faithful disciples on that memorable evening when He showed them His hands and His side. They were glad because they saw the Lord. The vision of the risen Christ, obscured by the dust of the day's toil and the mist of the world's confusion, glowed in the temple of their spirit. There they worshipped Him; they feasted on Him in their hearts. Refreshed by the personal communion which had come to them by the exercise of faith, they rose to face the night and the daybreak; they responded to the challenge of the world with a renewed courage and with an assurance of victory. The Saviour, whom they had seen in the supper-room, went with them into the street, into the home, into their work. In times of persecution He accompanied them into the place 'where there was a garden'; He stood by



them on the 'hill' when they were stretched upon a cross.

When we look upon those days, and then think of the dreary wanderings of the Church in intermediate years, we feel an aching of the heart because of the unutterable miseries that men have brought upon themselves and others by deserting the plain pathways in which the early Christians walked with their Lord.

It is not difficult to see how the perversion and corruption of the doctrines concerning forgiveness and the manner in which the new spiritual life is created and sustained have told upon the fortunes of Christianity. They have brought back the priest into the Church; they have produced a mechanical theory of salvation; they have created a condition of religious thought and ceremony such as was denounced by the most spiritual prophets and abolished by the coming of Christ. So long as the human priest stands in the way of the Cross, so long as the Church believes that salvation can only come through him and his actions, so long is it impossible to secure a great revival of religion.

Dean Stanley, in his *Christian Institutions*, gives us a glimpse of a better time. Speaking of absolution, he says—

As the misinterpretation of the texts on which the theory of Episcopal or Presbyterian absolution rests will die out before a sound understanding of the biblical records, so also the theory and practice itself, though with occasional

## 22 The Revival of Religion in England

recrudescences, will probably die out with the advance of civilization. The true power of the clergy will not be diminished but strengthened by the loss of this fictitious attribute. . . . In proportion as England has become, and in proportion as it will yet become, a truly free and truly educated people, able of itself to bind what ought to be bound, and to loose what ought to be loosed, in that proportion will the belief in priestly absolution vanish, just as the belief in wizards and necromancers has vanished before the advance of science.<sup>1</sup>

We agree with his conclusion—

The belief in the magical offices of a sacerdotal caste will vanish before the growth of manly Christian independence and generous Christian sympathy.

The forgiveness of sins is not only the gateway through which we pass into the new life, it is the means whereby we attain to a knowledge of the law of the Lord. In Jeremiah's description of the effect of the New Covenant it is predicted that, in those days which he saw in vision, the law of the Lord would be written on the heart. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews adopts the same view. He quotes Jeremiah's words: 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them' (viii. 10). It is impossible for us to sever this assurance from the words that close and complete the prophecy: 'For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins will I remember no

<sup>1</sup> pp. 184, 185.

more.' The light which most perfectly illumines the Christian conscience is that which springs up during the wonderful experiences that bring to us a knowledge of the pardon of our sins.

A knowledge of the law is not the only result that follows forgiveness. The prophet shows that through pardon comes a knowledge of the Lord. 'They shall not teach every man his fellow citizen, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins will I remember no more.'

Newman has said that 'self-knowledge is the root of all real religious knowledge.' That is one side of a great fact; the other is that a knowledge of God is the root of all real self-knowledge. Let us take Newman's line for a moment. When we come to a knowledge of ourselves as sinners, we are driven to know the God against whom we have sinned. In Him is the remedy for our desperate plight. Gazing into the face of Jesus Christ we see 'the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.' Truth and grace are there. Truth that sets up its rigid standard and casts us down by its condemnations; grace that reveals the undeserved loving-kindness of our Father, and breaks our heart by its gentle reproach. A knowledge of our sinful self drives us to know God, and when we know Him we are sure that He will forgive our sins.

But that is not all. Self-knowledge is acquired by

## 24 The Revival of Religion in England

painful and disappointing processes. Still, at every revelation of our weakness, defect, and sin we are urged to a more complete knowledge of God. We have made up our mind that He is our sole remedy against ourselves. We explore the mystery of His power and His love, and find, at every step, something that compels us to be holy, something that shows us how that holiness may be attained through Him.

If it is true that the knowledge of God and of His laws comes to us most effectually as the result of the remission of our sins, then we shall note with anxiety the pathway taken by the Church at the close of the Apostolic age.

When the light first falls on the Church we see where the teachers of the Christian religion stood. In the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles we have definite descriptions of the doctrines taught by the first preachers of the gospel. The burden of their teaching was 'the joyful news of sins forgiven.' Where that gospel glowed in the heart, its reception was followed by a great transformation, and the believer entered into a new life—a life in which shone two great lights: a knowledge of God, and a knowledge of His law.

If we take up the books that give us the clearest view of the condition of the Church immediately after the Apostolic age had closed, we detect a change in method. We insist upon the fact that a knowledge of the forgiveness of sins leads directly



to the highest morality. But when we read *The Teaching of the Twelve*, and search its pages, it is difficult to find the gospel preacher in it; at any rate it is difficult to discover that aspect of the gospel which is turned towards us in the Pentecostal scenes of the Acts of the Apostles. All candidates for baptism have to be instructed in the way of life and the way of death. Studying the teaching concerning the 'two ways,' we find in it an admirable code of Christian ethics; but where is there any insistence upon the central fact that a man must be born again before he can see the kingdom of God? It may be said that only those who had experienced the 'New Birth' were admitted as catechumens. But on the face of the document this does not appear. What is clear is that in a book which professes to record the 'Teaching of the Twelve,' the doctrine of the New Birth is not placed in the position of supreme prominence. It is so placed in the Gospel of St. John, and in the Acts and in the Epistles. But the *Teaching* is 'as moonlight unto sunlight.' The book reaches the level of the Epistle of St. James, but it does not lead us to the heights from which we discern the cross and the throne of Jesus Christ.

In two books, somewhat recently published, we gain an insight into the condition of the Christian Church in the sub-Apostolic age. The impression that is produced by reading them is that, unless the defects of their authors prevented them from seeing that which



## 26 The Revival of Religion in England

we are anxious to see, the supreme work of the Early Church, the preaching of the gospel, soon gave way to the ethical instruction of persons who were attracted to Christ by considerations other than an impassioned desire for the pardon of their sins. Professor Ernst von Dobschütz, in his *Christian Life in the Primitive Church*, sets himself to describe the moral education of the Church. It is true that he speaks of Christianity entering into the world and 'gathering churches round the gospel of God's forgiving grace'; but he bends his whole strength to depict the condition of the morals of the Church, and to describe the methods by which the system of morals was inculcated. When we turn to Harnack's *Expansion of Christianity* a similar scene is presented. We know Harnack's limitations; but there is no denying his immense learning and his unweariable powers of research. What does he say about the doctrines preached by the Early Church? Summarizing the mission-preaching to pagans, the type of which he thinks he finds in 1 Cor. xii. 2, and 1 Thess. i. 9, 10, he says—

Here we have the mission-preaching to pagans in a nutshell. The 'living and true God' is the first and final thing; the second is Jesus, the Son of God, the Judge, who secures us against the wrath to come, and is therefore 'Jesus the Lord.' To the living God, who is now made known, we owe faith and devoted service; to God's Son as Lord, our due is faith and hope. The contents of this brief message—objective and subjective, positive and negative—are inexhaustible. Yet the message itself is

thoroughly compact and complete. It is objective and positive as the message of the only God, who is spiritual, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord and Father of men, and the great disposer of human history ; furthermore, it is the message which tells of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came from heaven, made known the Father, died for sins, rose, sent the Spirit hither, and from His seat at God's right hand will return for the judgement ; finally, it is the message of salvation brought by Jesus the Saviour, that is, freedom from the tyranny of demons, sin, and death, together with the gift of life eternal. Then it is objective and negative, inasmuch as it announces the vanity of all other gods, and forms a protest against idols of gold and silver and wood, as well as against blind fate and atheism. Finally, it is subjective, as it declares the uselessness of all sacrifice, all temples, and all worship of man's devising, and opposes to these the worship of God in spirit and in truth, assurance of faith, holiness and self-control, love and brotherliness, and, lastly, the solid certainty of the resurrection and of life eternal, implying the futility of a present life which lies exposed to future judgement.<sup>1</sup>

Although Harnack may be wrong in resting his description of the mission-preaching to heathens upon the passages he quotes from St. Paul, there can be no doubt that, in process of time, the preaching of the Church did assume the aspect he has depicted.

Not only did the evangelical note sound more faintly as the years passed, but the motive of the ethical teaching seems to have become less predominantly Christian. At the present time we are stirred

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. pp. 108-110.

## 28 The Revival of Religion in England

to right conduct, not only by the voice of conscience, which urges us to obey the commands of law, but especially by a passionate desire to imitate our Lord. The 'imitation of Christ' is a phrase that is hallowed by sacred association. We owe an infinite debt of gratitude to Thomas à Kempis for reviving the idea. But it is undeniable that through many ages of Church history the possibility of such imitation was undiscerned. We cannot indicate the moment when the Church lost sight of the example of its Lord and began to cultivate morals by obeying a verbal ethical standard; but there can be no doubt that its gaze was diverted, and that, as a consequence, immense moral loss ensued. Harnack, in his *Expansion of Christianity*, writes words which should be seriously pondered. He says—

To 'imitate' or 'be like' Christ did not occupy the place one would expect among the ethical counsels of the age. Jesus had spoken of imitating God, and bidden men follow Himself, whilst the relationship of pupil and teacher readily suggested the formula of imitation. But whenever He was recognized as Messiah, as the Son of God, as Saviour and as Judge, the ideas of imitation and likeness had to give way, although the Apostles still continued to urge both in their epistles, and to hold up the mind, the labours, and the sufferings of Jesus as an example. In the Early Church the imitation of Christ never became a formal principle of ethics (to use a modern phrase) except for the virtuoso in religion, the ecclesiastic, the teacher, the ascetic, or the martyr; it played quite a subordinate part in the ethical teaching of the Church. The injunction to be like

Christ, in the strict sense of the term, also occurred with comparative rarity. Still, it is interesting to collect and examine the passages relative to this point; they show that whilst a parallel was fully drawn between the life of Christ and the career and conduct of distinguished Christians, such as the emperors, the Early Church did not go to the length of drawing up general regulations with regard to the imitation of Christ. For one thing, the Christology stood in the way, involving not imitation, but obedience; for another thing, the actual details of imitation seemed too severe. Those who made the attempt were always classed as Christians of a higher order (though even at this early period they were warned against presumption), so that the Catholic theory of 'evangelic counsels' has quite a primitive root.<sup>1</sup>

The student of the history of the Early Church, in trying to discover the points of departure from Apostolic teaching and experience, has no difficulty in detecting the difference between the first and the second methods of teaching ethics. Christ summed up all commandments into the great command, and showed that the love of God was the energizing force which enabled a man to keep the law. The Apostle Paul, continuing the teaching of his Master, declares that love is the fulfilling of the law, and that, when a man loves Christ and lives to be like Him, when he is consumed with a passion to be as He was in this world, then he walks according to the perfect law of liberty. If the mind that was in Christ is in us, then every Christian virtue is secured, then every

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. p. 107.



### 30 The Revival of Religion in England

Christian work is done. It is pitiful to watch the change that came over the experience of the Church when morals were catechetically taught. We see the creeping of the ice-sheet over the garden of the Lord, the garden of the Lord that was once beautiful with the flowers and fruits of a simple, loving Christian life. Under the ice-sheets that spread over some parts of the arctic regions, our explorers find the fossilized flowers that once opened their beauty in the warmth of the summer sun. Those flowers tell of nourishing soil and quickening air. They are relics of a lost paradise. When we note the frigid moralities of the post-Apostolic Church, and compare them with the graces that sprang up under the influence of the love of God in the church of the Philippians, we can only attribute the difference to the absence of atmosphere, and the veiling of the radiance of the Sun of Righteousness.

In tracing the processes by which 'godliness' was hardened into 'religion,' we must enter upon another line of thought. In the glimpses we get of the Church in its earliest stages, we find a fact that much impresses us. Harnack shows that the spread of Christianity, at the first, was not so much the result of Apostolic preaching as of the work of those who occupied a subordinate and, in some senses, an unofficial position in the Church. As to the Apostles, only one stands out in the New Testament as a great missionary, and he was not of the original twelve. St. Peter confined his work principally to



the Jews within the borders of his own country. St. John went further, and probably was the Bishop of Ephesus. The missionary labours of the other Apostles are only known to us through the uncertain legends of the Church. St. Paul is the great missionary; he is the man of whom we instinctively think when we imagine the activities and the successes of the Christian Church in the remotest times.

We must turn aside from the original Apostles if we are to discover the agents in the missionary work of the Early Church. We must think of other 'apostles'—those workers who existed in the Church after 70 A.D. and up to the middle of the second century. These men were not the successors of 'the twelve,' they were in the line of the 'other seventy also,' who were sent out, two by two, as travelling evangelists and missionaries. They preached the gospel from place to place. They were itinerant preachers, who had no fixed church, but went from town to town, calling men to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Harnack says: 'They were not permanent, elected officials of an individual church, but, primarily, independent teachers, who ascribed their calling to a divine command or charism.' The *Teaching of the Twelve* contains interesting directions concerning these wandering preachers. They were to be received 'as the Lord,' but were only permitted to remain a day or two in the Christian congregations which they visited. This was a measure of protection. It was thought that

## 32 The Revival of Religion in England

a true apostle would be so full of zeal to preach the gospel to the unconverted that he would not be able to settle down for a lengthy period in one place. The apostle was maintained by the church during his stay. If he asked for money, that was a sign that he was a false apostle. He received hospitality for two or three days; if he remained longer, he had to work for his living. If he refused, he was declared to be a 'Christ-trafficker,' i.e. one who makes merchandise of his Christian profession, or uses the name of Christ for selfish ends.

In close connexion with the apostles stand the prophets. The distinction between an apostle and a prophet, in respect of their sphere of action, seems to be that the apostle was a missionary to the heathen, and must not settle down in any church; the prophet was an instructor and comforter of converts, and, in some cases, he was allowed to settle in a particular congregation. As a rule, however, the prophets seem to have belonged to the whole Church, and they itinerated from place to place. They were specially illuminated men, who possessed a gift of expounding the deeper sense of the Scriptures, and of rousing the consciences and stirring the hearts of their hearers. If their addresses proved spiritually effective, then they possessed the chief sign of the true prophet. So far as we know, this was the only proof demanded of them as a warrant for their title and work. They were maintained by the church to which they ministered.

They must be poor. If any sign of avarice were detected in them, that showed they were false prophets.

In addition to the apostles and prophets, the itinerant preachers of the Early Church, there were the teachers. Some think that the teachers of the *Didaché* were members of the congregation who possessed the gift of instructive speech; others, that these men had a distinct office, and that, in general, their work was to go about among the churches and to minister edification, and support the spiritual life of Christian people in various localities. Upon the whole, it is probable that a teacher in the Early Church was a man who was conscious of his own gift and exercised it in public. He was not an elected officer of the church; the church had to decide whether it would hear him. The genuineness of teachers, as of apostles and prophets, was a matter for the consideration and decision of the churches. The teachers had a claim to be maintained by the church; but it does not appear that they were forbidden to earn money in other ways.

The apostles, prophets, and teachers were the gospel ministers who occupied the highest positions in the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic Church. But, in addition, we find that other church officials are mentioned, such as bishops, presbyters, and deacons. We have seen that the highest order of Christian preachers were, in the main, itinerant preachers. But we readily admit that a ministry that is exclusively

## 34 The Revival of Religion in England

itinerant, some members of which only remain a day or two in a particular locality, can never provide an effective form of government for a large and ever-increasing Church. It was necessary, therefore, that in the individual churches there should be congregational officers who would not only teach, but also govern, and be principally responsible for the administration of the affairs of the church. The difficulty was solved by the creation of the offices of presbyter, or bishop, and deacon. In the *Didaché* we find that they were elected or appointed by the people of the church they governed. They derived their authority, not directly from the Holy Spirit, as the apostles and prophets, but through the medium of the church. They were to be worthy of the Lord, meek and unselfish, truthful and of good report, and to be honoured like the prophets and teachers.

Dr. Schaff says that the bishops and deacons of the *Didaché* are evidently the same with those mentioned in the Acts and the Pauline epistles. He thinks that the bishops were the regular teachers and rulers who had the spiritual care of the flock; the deacons were the helpers who attended to the temporalities of the church, especially having the care of the poor and the sick. He also affirms that the bishops of the *Didaché* are identical with the presbyters. It was not until a later period, probably sometime in the second century, that bishops, priests, and deacons were distinguished as three separate orders in the Church.



There can be no doubt that the chief credit for the spread of Christianity belongs to the itinerant apostles, prophets, and teachers. But, in addition, we must remember that in those early days the members of the Church played an important part in influencing the pagan populations by which they were surrounded. In proportion to the spirituality, the morality, and the evangelizing zeal of a church, was the effect its members produced on their heathen neighbours. Harnack's conclusion is probably right. He says—

It was characteristic of this religion that every one who seriously confessed the faith proved of service to its propaganda. Christians are to let their light shine, that pagans may see their good works and glorify the Father in heaven. If this dominated all their life, and if they lived according to the precepts of their religion, they could not be hidden at all; by their very mode of living they could not fail to preach their faith plainly and audibly. . . . We cannot hesitate to believe that the great mission of Christianity was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries. Justin says so quite explicitly. What won him over was the impression made by the moral life which he found among Christians in general. . . . We may safely assume, too, that really women did play a leading rôle in the spread of this religion. But it is impossible to see in any one class of people inside the Church the chief agents of the Christian propaganda.<sup>1</sup>

In seeking for the causes which have influenced the Church, and which have diverted it from its true work of propagating the gospel, we cannot overlook the need

<sup>1</sup> *Expansion of Christianity*, vol. i. pp. 459-461.



## 36 The Revival of Religion in England

for organizing the Church which we have mentioned. It is useless to deny the necessity and value of such organization. Without it the results gathered together by enthusiastic workers gradually disappear. The necessity of organization arises out of the constitution of human nature; it is a law written in our members. So long as the social instinct survives and persists, so long will organization be imperative. The problem which an evangelizing Church has to solve, is so to organize itself as that organization shall be the helper, not the hinderer, of evangelization. If organization prevents genuine evangelization, then it must be made to yield. Those who have followed the course of the Church through the ages know that the difficulty that always confronts an evangelizing Church arises from the dominance of an organization that is unpliant and imperious. In such cases, organization, instead of being a servant, becomes a tyrant. This danger, arising from an inflexible organization, was soon revealed in the experiences of the Early Church. The apostles and prophets, even the evangelists, disappeared.

Then [says Schaff] the bishops absorbed all the higher offices and functions, and became in the estimation of the Church the successors of the apostles; while the presbyters became priests, and the deacons Levites in the new Christian Catholic hierarchy.

In considering the forces which diverted the Primitive Church from its mission, it is impossible to overlook the great change which took place in the fourth

century, when Constantine took the Church under his patronage, and let loose upon it the influences of the world. We shall content ourselves by quoting the words of John Wesley on this subject. In his sermon entitled 'Of the Former Times,' he says—

I have been long convinced, from the whole tenor of ancient history, that this very event, Constantine's calling himself a Christian, and pouring that flood of wealth and honour on the Christian Church, the clergy in particular, was productive of more evil to the Church than all the ten persecutions put together. From the time that power, riches, and honour of all kinds were heaped upon the Christians, vice of all kinds came in like a flood, both on the clergy and laity. From the time that the Church and State, the kingdoms of Christ and of the world, were so strangely and unnaturally blended together, Christianity and Heathenism were so thoroughly incorporated with each other that they will hardly ever be divided till Christ comes to reign upon earth. So that, instead of fancying that the glory of the New Jerusalem covered the earth at that period, we have terrible proof that it was then, and has ever since been, covered with the smoke of the bottomless pit.<sup>1</sup>

These words are undoubtedly strong, but they come from the pen of a man who was conversant with Church history, and who was stung to the quick by the spectacle of the secularizing of the Primitive Church, and the abandonment by that Church of the mission it had received from the lips of its Lord.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. ii. p. 164.

## 38 The Revival of Religion in England

It is undoubted that a great fact is represented by the connexion of the Church and the State. A Church co-terminous with the State is an ideal after which many men of the highest Christian character have striven ; but the attempt to realize that ideal has been attended with dangers which have assailed the Church as a moral, a spiritual, and an evangelizing force. The world has been too much with the Church ; and, as a rule, the world has conquered. The warning that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal has been neglected, or has fallen on deaf ears. Those weapons have been taken up to advance the supposed interests of the Church, and the result has been that there are pages of Church history that are covered with records of the persecution of Christian people by Christian people which justify the sneers of Gibbon, and which have left indelible disgrace on those who instigated and practised them. But that is not all. When the spirit of the world pervades the Church, when it captures and subdues its ministers, then the love of luxury, the love of office, and the love of meddling with civil affairs, threaten the existence of the evangelist. When all seek their own, who has time or inclination to follow the wandering souls of men ? In such times the evangelist disappears, and his place is taken by the 'priest,' who obtrudes himself, the sacraments, and the Church into the position where the evangelist would have put the living Saviour.

In searching for the causes which diverted the

Primitive Church from its task, and led it to abandon its mission, there is one other subject upon which we must touch in closing our survey. There can be no doubt that, after the age of the Twelve Apostles, the manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the world assumed another form. We do not speak now of the extraordinary evidences which He gave of His presence in the bestowment of gifts of healing and of speaking with tongues. We do not know when these extraordinary gifts ceased. Wesley, speaking on the subject in his sermon on 'The More Excellent Way,' says—

It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts were common in the Church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian. . . . From that time they almost totally ceased ; very few instances of the kind were found. The cause of this was not, as has been vulgarly supposed, 'because there was no more occasion for them,' because all the world was become Christians. This is a miserable mistake ; not a twentieth part of it was then nominally Christian. The real cause was 'the love of many,' almost of all Christians, so called, was 'waxed cold.' The Christians had no more of the Spirit of Christ than the other Heathens. The Son of Man, when He came to examine His Church, could hardly find 'faith upon earth' ! This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian Church ; because the Christians were turned Heathens again, and had only a dead form left.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. vii. pp. 26, 27.



## 40 The Revival of Religion in England

Our concern now is not so much with the extraordinary gifts that the Spirit bestowed on the churches, as with the manifestations of His presence which light up the story of the Acts of the Apostles with wonderful radiance. We have seen that both in the Jewish and the Gentile Pentecosts there was a remarkable display of the Spirit's presence. It came in answer to prayer ; it came at the moment when a living faith in Christ as the ransom from sin was exercised. We also remember that interesting case which occurred at Ephesus, when certain disciples of John the Baptist, who had accepted the doctrine of repentance, but who had not passed into the clear light of the teaching which concerns the forgiveness of sins, told St. Paul that they had never heard that when a man believes he receives the Holy Ghost. They were bewildered wanderers in the twilight ; but St. Paul brought them into the sunshine of noon. Then, when they believed in the Lord Jesus—that is, when they believed in Him as the Saviour from sin—the Holy Spirit came upon them as He came upon those who were assembled in the upper room and in the house of Cornelius. We hold that whatever may have been the intention of God respecting 'extraordinary gifts,' the descent of the Holy Spirit upon a man who believes in Christ to the forgiveness of his sins was intended to be a perpetual experience in the Church.

But, further, the manifestations of the Spirit were not confined to the occasions when penitent sinners

confessed their sins and found pardon. There are some, in the present day, who upbraid us because we pray for the coming of the Spirit. They say that the Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, and that we need not implore Him to descend again. Perhaps our phraseology may be imperfect, but we must be careful lest we lose our hold of the fact that the gift of the Spirit to individuals and to churches is repeated. The Holy Spirit is present at all times in the Church and the world, but it is not always that His light glows before our eyes. It is in special moments that He comes to us and thrills us with His touch. Let us remember that, before the day of Pentecost, the Psalmist had uttered that most pathetic prayer, 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.' Before the day of Pentecost Christ had breathed on His disciples, and had bestowed the Holy Spirit upon them. After the day of Pentecost, when the Church welcomed St. Peter and St. John, who had returned from the council, in answer to prayer 'the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' Other passages of Scripture teach the fact that the Holy Spirit was not once for all given on the day of Pentecost.

There can be no doubt that to individuals and to churches, in answer to prayer, the Spirit was repeatedly given. And when the Spirit was so given, the fainting soul was revived; the frightened church was quickened and spake the word with boldness; a change was effected

## 42 The Revival of Religion in England

which excited the astonishment of the bystanders; a fire fell from heaven which purified the church and caused it to respond to the prophetic cry, 'Arise, shine, thy light is come; the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

These occasions may be called times of revival. The word 'revival' is old. The Psalmist pleads: 'Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?' New life bringing a new joy—that is a fair description of a revival of religion. In searching the history of the Church, after the close of the Apostolic age and onward through gloomy and dreary centuries, we fail to find that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was maintained in the form in which it is presented to us in the New Testament. Let us not do an injustice to the Church. In all times some men and women, who have been the bright particular stars of the firmament, have practised the presence of the Holy Spirit, and have shone with His light and beauty. But we contend that, in the history of the Church, there have been centuries in which the presence and work of the Holy Spirit have only been officially recognized. During those depressing and dangerous ages the gifts of the Spirit have been unappropriated by the living faith of a living Church. Indeed, they have been considered the peculiar possession of a privileged religious caste. When a revival of religion shakes the land, one of the truths which is most quickly demonstrated is

that the Lord has poured out His Spirit as a free gift 'upon all flesh.' The experiences of the day of Pentecost repeat themselves, and the weary Church, finding its lost youth, walks in the morning light of Apostolic days.



## II

## The Social Condition of England

THE Revival of Religion in England in the eighteenth century was a national event.

The far-seeing historian gives it a prominent place in his description of the reigns of the Georges, because he perceives its profound influence on the social, moral, and religious condition of the country. The man who writes upon the eighteenth century without a knowledge of the existence and work of John Wesley is unfit for the task he has too precipitately taken in hand.

It is admitted that Wesley changed the spirit of the age in which he lived. It is impossible to estimate the magnitude of that change unless we form some idea of the condition of England at the time when the great evangelist did his revolutionary work. We will try to give details from which that condition may be judged.

Macaulay, in the famous third chapter of his *History*, which contains his sketch of England in the seventeenth century, affirms that, if the England of

1685 could, by some magical process, be set before our eyes,

we should not know one landscape in a hundred, or one building in ten thousand. The country gentleman would not recognize his own fields. The inhabitant of the town would not recognize his own street. Everything has been changed but the great features of nature, and a few massive and durable works of human art. Everything would be strange to us. Many thousands of square miles which are now rich corn-land and meadow, intersected by green hedgerows, and dotted with villages and pleasant country seats, would appear as moors overgrown with furze, or fens abandoned to wild ducks. We should see straggling huts built of wood and covered with thatch, where we now see manufacturing towns and seaports renowned to the farthest ends of the world. The capital itself would shrink to dimensions not much exceeding those of its present suburb on the south of the Thames.<sup>1</sup>

Macaulay's vivid words come to our mind when we try to imagine the condition of England in the century which witnessed the work and the triumphs of the Evangelical Revival. With slight alteration the description applies to the eighteenth century. We are so accustomed to the England of to-day, with its huge towns and its abounding population, that we find it difficult to understand that it was not until the nineteenth century that the aspect of the country was strikingly transformed. The best authorities agree that the population of England remained stationary from the fourteenth to the seventeenth

<sup>1</sup> *History*, vol. i. p. 292, Cabinet ed.

## 46 The Revival of Religion in England

century; then came a time of rapid increase, which began to manifest itself in the eighteenth century; but, as we have suggested, the increase did not reach an astonishing rate until the last century. Then the big towns spread over the green fields and began to swallow up the country.

England, at the close of Elizabeth's reign, only contained two and a half millions of persons. In the time of James II, the population, according to Macaulay's estimate, was between five and five and a half millions. But, in the seventeenth century, owing to the growth of agriculture, and probably to the increasing activity of the English in textile industries, there was an extraordinary addition to the population of the island. In his *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, Professor Thorold Rogers estimates the population of England in 1772 as seven and a half, or, possibly, eight millions.<sup>1</sup> It will be seen that, as compared with our present numbers, the population of England in the eighteenth century was small.

It may assist us to understand the condition of the country in respect of population if we note that, in 1700, London contained only about five hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. Fifty years later the population had increased by not more than fifty thousand. When John Wesley formed his Society in the Foundery, he lived in a city that contained less than six hundred thousand persons.

<sup>1</sup> p. 477.

The size of London in the eighteenth century impresses us by its comparative insignificance. But when we turn to the country the contrast between the past and the present is even more striking. If we begin in the North we are instantly reminded of Macaulay's description of the sparsely populated land. Lancashire in the seventeenth century was scantily peopled. It was one of the poorest of the English counties. It took rank with Cumberland. When the various counties were assessed for ship-money in 1636, the two counties stood nearly at the bottom of the list in respect of opulence. As to the matter of population, in 1773 Liverpool contained 34,407 inhabitants, and Manchester and Salford 27,246. The return for Bolton and Little Bolton in the same year is 5,339; and for Bury, in 1772, 2,090. Yorkshire was sprinkled over with little towns, and was one of the poorest counties. Even Leeds, in 1775, only contained 17,121 persons.

Journeying from the sparsely populated North, and passing through the Midlands, we find that England, in the eighteenth century, was a country of small towns and little villages, which were encompassed by great stretches of waste and poorly cultivated land. We pause for a moment at Birmingham. A note on Westley's 'Plan' of the town informs us that in 1700 it contained 15,082 inhabitants. After that date it rapidly increased. In 1731 the population numbered about 24,000 persons.

Leaving Birmingham and journeying into the West,



## 48 The Revival of Religion in England

we still feel that the England of the eighteenth century was an unoccupied country. The only town that arrests our attention is Bristol. In the middle of the century its population was 33,000. In 1775 Bristol, Clifton, and Bedminster contained at least 35,440 inhabitants. When we remember that, in the eighteenth century, Bristol was the second city in the kingdom, we may judge of the size of other towns.

In these days, when a Manchester man travels to London in the morning, transacts business in the city, and returns to his northern home in the evening ; when England thrills, as in a moment, at the report of some great event contained in the newspapers ; when the heart-throb of London is felt throughout the Empire, it is difficult to understand the condition of isolation in which the capital stood during the eighteenth century. The problem does not only concern the relation of London to the provinces. It is a singular fact that the districts of London were divided from each other by sharp lines. Sydney, in his *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, says—

Though the extent of the city was commensurately limited, the inhabitants of the various districts which it comprised were not only almost totally unacquainted with each other, but were quite distinct in their habits, manners, and characteristics. Obviously, this common ignorance originated in the complete lack of communication which then existed, and which precluded one section of the community from paying frequent visits to the other section. . . . Such a state of isolation tended to produce peculiarities.

These peculiarities were never corrected, and the consequence was that those resident in the districts situated to the west of Temple Bar differed as much from the householders and shopkeepers of Bishopsgate Without, Whitechapel, Stepney, and the other localities which lay on the Essex side of the City, as they now do from the peasantry of Brittany, or the Western Pyrenees.<sup>1</sup>

The fact of the isolation of the districts into which London was divided in the eighteenth century has been overlooked by those historians who have only been conscious of the life, the thought, the acts, and the manners of the people who lived west of Temple Bar. The greatest discovery that the modern historian has made is the discovery of the people of England. In the eighteenth century, the leaders of the Church and of the State seemed to be ignorant of the existence of what we call 'the masses.' They little thought that, in the next century, the crowds that moved before their eyes as in a haze would emerge into sun-bright clearness, holding in their hands the mastery of the nation.

If the districts of London were isolated from each other, what shall be said of the relation of the provinces to the mother city? Picturesque writers and imaginative artists have done much to make the eighteenth century fascinating and charming. Sketches of old coaching days embellish the pages of daintily bound books, and the exquisite scenes which are pictured elicit from the

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. p. 43.

## 50 The Revival of Religion in England

unwary enthusiast a passionate cry for 'the good old times.' But hard facts interfere with artistic illusions. Let any man read the descriptions of the adventures of Arthur Young, as he plunged through the morasses and quagmires which by courtesy were called roads, in his attempts to ascertain the agricultural condition of the counties of England, and he will sympathize with the strong language which the testy traveller so frequently employed. Not only was the state of the roads abominable, but, even where they were sufficiently sound to bear the passage of a stage-coach, any attempt to travel from the provincial towns to London was fraught with so much peril that only the most urgent necessity induced men to undertake it. Let us select one instance. At the present time the journey from Liverpool to London is quickly and safely accomplished in a few hours. Sydney tells us that, in 1753, intercourse between Liverpool and London, as well as between that port and the interior of the country, was very rare. In that year there was not a single stage-coach that left Liverpool for any other town than London. The journey to the metropolis occupied four days, and this was considered very swift travelling.

The old Lancashire and Cheshire stage-wagons, which started from the Axe Inn, Aldermanbury, London, every Monday and Thursday, were ten days on the road in summer and eleven in winter.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 19.

It was not until April, 1774, that a stage-coach began to run between Liverpool, Warrington, and Manchester, and that only ran thrice a week. The expresses now flash along the line from Liverpool to Manchester every hour, and accomplish the journey in forty-five minutes. The flight of the express and the crawl of the stage-wagon mark the difference between the eighteenth and the present century.

If London was an isolated city, if the provincial towns were nearly cut off from communication with each other and with the capital, what was the condition of the villages? Professor Rogers says—

There is, I believe, no part of the Western world in which so little change was induced on the fortunes, on the life, and on the habits of the people, as there has been in rural England from the peaceful reign of Henry III to the earlier years of George III.<sup>1</sup>

What does that statement imply? It implies that the villages were so completely shut off from all intercourse with the other parts of the country that, for five centuries and a half, that is, for fifteen or sixteen generations, there was no appreciable alteration in the condition of the rustics of England. Rogers further says—

Changes of dynasty, civil wars, changes in religion, had occurred without making a break, or leaving a memory, in the routine of rural existence.

<sup>1</sup> *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, p. 86.



## 52 The Revival of Religion in England

Now and again, in these days, we are sometimes startled by reports of incidents in village life which seem to indicate that for hundreds of years, in secluded spots, time has stood still. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the rural life of England proceeded along the dull dead level on which it had moved since the days of Henry III.

When we have sufficiently considered the indisputable fact of the isolation of the capital from the towns, and of both from the villages and hamlets of England in the eighteenth century, we shall begin to perceive one element of the problem that was faced and solved by the men who were the leaders in the Revival which transformed and transfigured the face of England. We watch with interest and wonder John Wesley and his comrades pushing their way on horseback over wild mountains, into valleys and dales which were inaccessible to ordinary travellers. We can understand why John Wesley so often records the 'staring' of the people who crowded round him. The sight of a strange face in some of the towns and in all of the villages of England in the eighteenth century, excited amazement, and furnished a thrilling topic of conversation at the ale-bench and the hearth-side.

At the present time, the social condition of the people of England is attracting keen attention. Abundant statistics are being gathered, and the theorist and the practical man make use of them according to the bent of their minds. In the eighteenth

century a few enlightened men studied the condition of sections of the population, but it is difficult to discover any complete survey of the state of the people at large. Professor Rogers, in his *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, has laid us under an enduring obligation, and from the pages of his invaluable book it is possible to get a glimpse of a fascinating subject.

Guided by Professor Rogers, we find that, judged by the standard of wages, and comparing the wages received with the cost of the necessaries of life, the fifteenth and the first quarter of the sixteenth century were 'the golden age of the English labourer.' In the sixteenth century his circumstances changed. Hard times set in, and, with various fluctuations, continued. In the first half of the eighteenth century, however, the agricultural labourer was better off than he had been since the 'golden age.' The calculations in Professor Rogers's book are carefully made, and are reliable. In the eyes of a town mechanic, at the present time, the wages paid to farm-labourers, even in an 'age of gold,' would appear contemptible, but the modern mechanic is often oblivious of the fact that the amount of wage must be measured by its capacity to meet absolutely necessary expenses. Cheap and abundant food, a life lived in surroundings that conduce to health, the absence of temptations to spend money on unnecessary things, all must be considered when we are asked to decide the question of wage. There can be little doubt that, at the present time,

## 54 The Revival of Religion in England

many agricultural labourers are in a better condition than thousands of the artisans of our towns; in the first half of the eighteenth century the superiority of the position of the agricultural labourer in some parts of the country is undeniable. The villages were left

To dumb forgetfulness a prey;

their inhabitants were afflicted with an apathy that irritates a modern progressive; the cottages in which the people herded defied every law of sanitary science; the men possessed the uninquiring mind of the serf; the women drudged; most of the children were uneducated: but, so far as food for the body is concerned, and so far as a superficial happiness is concerned,

Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,

is not altogether a fanciful picture created by Goldsmith's graceful pen.

Considerable information concerning the condition of the working classes in the eighteenth century may be gathered from Professor Rogers's pages. We will content ourselves by noting a few facts that will cast light upon the people among whom John Wesley and his fellow evangelists did their principal work. It is fortunate that Arthur Young does not content himself with giving us information about the wages paid for agricultural labour exclusively; he also inserts information concerning the price paid to other workers. Professor Rogers, gathering this information together, says that the highest wages were earned by colliers.

At Newcastle they could get 15s. a week, and at Wakefield 11s. In iron and cutlery works the weekly wages were 10s. at Rotherham and 13s. 6d. at Sheffield. Workmen in porcelain at Liverpool, Burslem, and Worcester received, respectively, 8s. 11d., 9s. 6d., and 9s. The average weekly payment for spinning and weaving was 8s. 7d.; the lowest wages, out of seven localities, being paid at Manchester for fustians, 7s. 1d.; the highest at Wakefield for cloth, 10s. The average wages of women in textile manufactures was 4s. 2½d.; of boys, 2s. 11¾d.; and of girls, 2s. 7d. The drugget-weavers of Braintree earned about 9s.; the wool-combers 12s.; the Wilton carpet-weavers from 10s. to 12s.; the Gloucester pin-makers from 10s. to 12s.; the woollen manufacturers of Henningham, 7s.; the combers from 12s. to 14s.; the steel-polishers of Woodstock from 15s. to 42s.; the blanket-weavers of Witney from 10s. to 12s. The best-paid workmen in textile fabrics were the wool-combers, who earned on an average, wherever they were, about 13s. a week; the lowest, the say and calamanco weavers of Lavenham, who were paid 5s. 9d.

Comparing these wages with those paid in some localities to the agricultural labourer, we are not surprised to find evidence of the townward drift, which has become so pronounced in our own time. The best-paid agricultural labourers were those in Kent and Middlesex, and they received a weekly wage of 11s. 4d. The worst paid were those of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire; they got 5s. 2½d. a week. Young tells us that,



## 56 The Revival of Religion in England

taking all things together, the wages of the manufacturing labourer were, on the average, 8*d.* a week beyond those of the agricultural labourer. He incidentally mentions that in the West of England the farm-labourers were paid only 5*s.* and 6*s.* all the year round.

Turning from those whom we are accustomed to call the 'working classes,' we must briefly refer to the condition of the shopkeepers and the traders of London and the provinces. Their position, judged by the sketches which have survived in the pages of the novelists of the period, differed greatly from that of the tradesmen of the present day. In country towns, especially, their life was slow and comparatively uneventful. Their goods were brought to them by stage-wagons that crawled along the ill-kept roads, or were carried by pack-horses, that plunged through the mud in which they nearly foundered. The shops were small, ill-lighted, and contained a scanty supply of goods. Market-day brought some bustle into the country towns; but, at other times, the tradesman had leisure to bask in the sunshine at the door of his shop, or to gossip with his cronies at the ale-house table. It is difficult to estimate the average income of the eighteenth-century shopkeeper, but one thing must be borne in mind—on the trading class fell, with crushing weight, that great burden of taxation which was the result of the prolonged campaigns that were fought on the Continent. Those taxes made serious inroads on their uncertain income, and extorted from them many a

groan. In London, trade was more briskly and profitably done, but, even there, the citizen was only too familiar with that dark figure of Care which still dogs the footsteps of the man of commerce.

Above the labourers and the tradesmen, in social rank, stood 'the upper classes.' They dwelt in a region of their own. That region lay far from the common tracks of men. Its line of demarcation was sharply defined. We do not think that the aloofness of the upper classes arose, in all cases, from any conscious contempt for persons who were in an inferior social position. It seemed rather the product of indifference. East of Temple Bar was an unknown country. With rare exceptions, the people who lived there were uninteresting and not worth discovering. And so the members of the 'upper classes' lived within the ring fence of 'good Society.' They consorted together to talk politics and literature and art in coffee-house and club; they cultivated luxury and pleasure with an assiduity which, if the same energy had been spent on nobler things, would have raised England to a conspicuous height of moral greatness; they excited themselves over trifles, and wasted in frivolity and dilettantism the golden opportunities God had given them for the service of man; and, all the time, millions of Englishmen lay around them perishing of neglect. We keenly appreciate the literary and artistic aspects of the eighteenth century; we recognize the efforts of Addison and

## 58 The Revival of Religion in England

Johnson to raise the moral tone of the literature and of the cultured people of the day; but it is difficult to restrain our impatience in the presence of the fatal paralysis of sympathy which made it impossible for the upper classes to imagine those reforms which, in a brighter and more vitalized age, have changed the condition of the people of England. Mr. Sydney has gathered together, in his *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, a number of remarkable facts relating to the condition of the upper classes in the times of which he writes. We shrink from his conclusion that 'nine-tenths of the English people of quality in the eighteenth century were either knaves or fools.'<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to resist the evidence he produces; but charity suggests a more lenient verdict. It is unfortunate when the 'people of quality' in a country are devoid of a sense of responsibility; when they lack moral earnestness; when they are out of touch with the rest of their countrymen; when the spectacle they exhibit to those who are eager to imitate them is that of a luxurious race loving pleasure and forgetting God.

When we turn from the contemplation of the classes whose condition we have considered, we find that we have not finished our investigation into the condition of the people of England. The lower sections of the working classes are always subject to variations of fortune which tend to make their lot hard

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 123.

and cruel. Beneath them, in this country, there are many thousands who have no claim to be considered as workers: they live in the helplessness and suffering that are the results of habitual poverty. During the earlier years of the eighteenth century, the condition of the country, as we have seen, was prosperous; but after a time harvests failed, prices rose, work was scarce, and thousands of the English people were brought to the verge of starvation. In London the existence of poverty was marked. Sydney considers that much of this poverty was due to early and improvident marriages, to unthrifty habits, and to drunkenness; but, on the other hand, he thinks that a vast amount of it arose from the lack of employment. Hundreds who were able and willing to work could not find in London any means of subsistence.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Wendeborn, a German minister who lived for many years during the eighteenth century in London, was much impressed by the spectacle of English poverty. He says—

There are in no country such large contributions raised for the support of the poor as in England, yet there is nowhere so great a number of them; and their condition, in comparison with the poor of other countries, appears truly the most miserable. They never seem to be apprehensive, or to think of making any provision for a time of want. In Germany and other northern countries of

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. p. 66.



## 60 The Revival of Religion in England

Europe, the poor keep always in mind that it is cold in winter, and that no harvests or fruits can be reaped from the earth while it is covered with snow. On this account they consider in time the warmer clothing they will then require, and lay up such a store of provisions as their circumstances allow, in order to prepare themselves in the best manner possible for the inclemency of that season. But, in England, it seems as if the poor and necessitous never looked forward, or would not trouble themselves to think of what may happen to them in future. They neither foresee the winter's cold, nor the scarcity of that season; and, therefore, when it arrives, are the most forlorn beings imaginable. The lower classes of people have no disposition to be frugal or provident. When trade becomes dull and employment scanty, they who maintained themselves by their labour must either beg or obtain support for themselves and their families from the parish. In those counties and towns where manufactures are carried on, there is for this very reason the greatest number of poor; for as soon as any particular branch of them is on the decline, the workmen who were employed in it are threatened with want, and in danger of starving.<sup>1</sup>

In another place, he says—

In no other country are more poor to be seen than in England, and in no city a greater number of beggars than in London. A foreigner who hears of many millions annually raised for the benefit of the poor . . . will find himself unable to explain how it happens, that in his walks he is, almost every hundred yards, disturbed by the lamentations of unfortunate persons who demand his charity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A View of England towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. i. p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.

In Professor Rogers's *Six Centuries of Work and Wages* the question of poverty is exhaustively discussed. With much skill, insight, and knowledge, he states the problem which still awaits solution. At the present moment we are only concerned with it in its relation to the eighteenth century. With the authority of a master of his subject, Mr. Rogers declares that, with the exception of about fifty years in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, 'the wages of labour have been a bare subsistence, constantly supplemented by the poor-rate.'<sup>1</sup> In modern times a considerable amelioration in the condition of some kinds of labour has been effected, but there can be no doubt that Rogers's statement is correct so far as concerns the condition of labourers' wages during the second half of the eighteenth century.

It must not be supposed that the nation was callous to the appeal made by the sufferings of the poor. Much poverty was relieved by private benevolence, and more by doles from the poor-rates. The annual expenditure in poor-rates is said to have trebled between the close of the reign of Anne and the year 1750. The sum raised astonished a foreigner like Dr. Wendeborn. It amounted to, at least, three millions. He cries—

The revenues of the kingdom of Denmark are six millions of thalers, which answers to one million of pounds sterling ; and those of Sweden amount hardly to a million and a half, English money. With half of the provision of

## 62 The Revival of Religion in England

the poor in England, therefore, whole realms, crowns, armies, navies, and other expenses of the State are supported! How much matter is here for an arithmetician, a financier, and a philosophic observer! <sup>1</sup>

Although Dr. Wendeborn does not 'presume' to say that the funds for the poor were mismanaged and misapplied, other writers have not exercised a similar reticence. Dr. Franklin, for instance, roundly affirmed that the enormous sum collected annually for the poor in England 'increased their number as well as their wretchedness.'

We have spoken of the extraordinary ignorance of each other which, like a black dividing-line, separated class from class in the England of the eighteenth century. That line was strongly marked, and its existence was constantly evidenced. If we wish to understand how much the governing classes of a country know of the conditions of those whom they govern, we ought to inspect their criminal code. If we find that it only contains measures of repression and punishment, we may be sure that its framers know little of the people whom they so shamefully misgovern. Let us apply this test to the England of the eighteenth century. Every man who is acquainted with the code then existing will be of Rogers's opinion, that—

the desperation which poverty and misery produce, and the crime they suggest, were met by a code

<sup>1</sup> *A View of England*, vol. i. p. 117.

more sanguinary and brutal than any which a civilized nation had ever heretofore devised, or a high-spirited one submitted to.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Samuel Romilly, in his *Observations on a Late Publication, intituled Thoughts on Executive Justice*, reviews the criminal law of England, and says—

The first thing which strikes one is the melancholy truth that among the variety of actions which men are daily liable to commit, no less than one hundred and sixty have been declared by Act of Parliament to be felonies without benefit of clergy ; or, in other words, to be worthy of instant death.<sup>2</sup>

Romilly founds his statement on Blackstone's *Commentaries*; and, in a note, he draws attention to the fact that, since the publication of those *Commentaries*, the number of felonies had been considerably augmented by the legislature. Sydney says—

To steal a horse or a sheep ; to snatch property from the hands of a man and run away with it ; to steal to the amount of forty shillings in a dwelling-house, or privately to the value of five shillings in a shop ; to pick a pocket of only twelve pence and a farthing ; these offences all continued till the end of the eighteenth century to be punishable with death.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. John Latimer, in *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, gives a list of the persons executed in that city during the first half of the eighteenth

<sup>1</sup> *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, p. 490.

<sup>2</sup> p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *England and the English*, vol. ii. pp. 268, 269.



## 64 The Revival of Religion in England

century. The list is confessedly incomplete, but, so far as we can judge by its details, executions for murder were comparatively infrequent. Out of the seventy-seven criminals whose cases and crimes are cited, only eighteen suffered death for murder. The rest were executed for offences which would now be punished by imprisonment. It is no wonder that the number of executions in England was great. Lecky tells us that, when Blackstone wrote, it was a very ordinary occurrence for ten or twelve culprits to be hung on a single occasion, and for forty or fifty to be condemned at a single assize. In 1732 no less than seventy persons received sentence of death at the Old Bailey. In the same year eighteen persons were hung in one day in the town of Cork.<sup>1</sup>

Execution by hanging was not the only form of punishment inflicted on criminals. The barbarities inflicted on a man who was found guilty of high treason are too horrible to be described. It is enough to say that, so late as 1746, eight persons were slowly done to death by the hands of the executioner. If a man refused to plead on a capital charge, then the law directed that he was to be laid naked on his back, in a dark room, and weights of stone or iron were to be placed on his breast till he died. This hideous punishment was inflicted in England in 1721 and in 1735. A criminal was sentenced to the same fate in 1741, but he escaped by at last consenting to plead. This

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, vol. i. p. 505.

disgraceful law was not repealed till 1771. It is almost incredible that women who were found guilty of murdering their husbands, or of the other offences comprised under the terms high or petit treason, were publicly burnt, in accordance with a law which was not abolished till 1790. It is true that in practice, before the fire touched the body of the woman, the executioner mercifully strangled the victim; but sometimes, as in a case which occurred in 1726, the fire interfered with the process of strangulation, and a considerable time elapsed before the agonies of the woman were ended.

It is painful to record these brutalities, but it is impossible to understand the temper of the English people in the eighteenth century unless we do so. An utter callousness to the sufferings of criminals prevailed. We may go further. Those sufferings were a source of pleasurable excitement to the crowds that witnessed them. When the death-carts rumbled along the road from Newgate to Tyburn, the pavements were crowded with spectators. From the windows of the houses, hosts of people looked out with admiration upon the jaunty men who, with nosegays on their breasts, journeyed on the solemn path that broke away so suddenly into eternity. Let the wanderer along the present Oxford Street imagine the scene. Let him try to conceive the possibility of its repetition to-day. He will then be able to form some idea of the immeasurable distance that divides us

## 66 The Revival of Religion in England

from the spirit and the customs of the eighteenth century.

We ask in amazement if any voice was raised in Church or State, against the brutal punishments contained in the criminal code of England. The answer is disappointing. The ascertained facts show that, so far as the executions for felony are concerned, not only was there an absence of protest, but such executions were approved by the most enlightened opinion of the time. We have mentioned Sir Samuel Romilly's *Observations*. His little pamphlet was written in answer to a publication intituled *Thoughts on Executive Justice*. In that publication the author declared that the statutes concerning the punishment of crime in England were such as no stranger could contemplate without imagining the English nation to be 'the happiest people under the sun, or without admiring the disposition of the whole, as well as the adapting of every part to the public good.' So enamoured of our 'sanguinary' code was the author that he exhorted judges to enforce the laws with the utmost rigour, expressing the opinion that these laws approached as near to perfection as any law could be expected to do which emanated from 'the finite wisdom of humanity.' It is strange that, according to Sir Samuel Romilly, some of the learned judges to whom the *Thoughts on Executive Justice* was addressed seemed inclined to try the terrible expedient which was recommended. With shame we confess that the writer of this publication,

which drew forth such a noble protest from Sir Samuel Romilly, was a prominent clergyman of the Evangelical party in the Church of England.

It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century was well on its way that the English nation woke up to the fact that the spectacle of a public execution has a brutalizing effect upon those who witness it. What wonder, then, that in 1783, a year when fifty-one persons were executed in London, Dr. Johnson was found protesting against the proposed abolition of the Tyburn processions? Boswell relates that one night, in March, 1783, at the Literary Club, the subject of the discontinuance of these ghastly parades was discussed. Dr. Johnson, speaking to Sir William Scott, said—

The age is running mad after innovation, and all the business of the world is to be done in a new way. Men are to be hanged in a new way; Tyburn itself is not safe from the fury of innovation.

Some one present ventured to argue that such a step would be a vast improvement.

No, sir [thundered Johnson], it is not an improvement. They object that the old method drew together a number of spectators. Sir, executions are intended to draw spectators. If they do not draw spectators, they don't answer their purpose. The old method was most satisfactory to all parties; the public was gratified by a procession; the criminal was supported by it; why is all this swept away?



## 68 The Revival of Religion in England

When we consider the opinions of such a man as Dr. Johnson, we do not wonder that the law held on its sanguinary way unchecked by the protests of judges and legislators. When the eighteenth century was drawing to a close, a new spirit of philanthropy made its presence felt in English society. To that spirit Sir Samuel Romilly made his appeal. By slow degrees the Statute Book of England was cleansed of its more glaring cruelties, and brought into harmony with the ideas of pity and mercy which men had learned from the new revelation of the forgiving love of God.

It will be admitted that the condition of the prisons of a country reveal its character. The people who are careless of the way in which prisoners awaiting trial, or serving their sentences, are treated, write a sentence of condemnation against themselves. Judged by this test, the England of the eighteenth century stands condemned. It is impossible to exaggerate the loathsomeness of the dens in which men and women were then confined, or the abominations that were hidden behind the sullen walls of our prisons. In 1729, through the influence of General Oglethorpe, a commission was obtained for investigating the condition of the three London prisons for debtors. Beginning with the Fleet, the commission discovered that it was divided into two classes, known as the Common Side and the Master's Side. The former contained three wards, tenanted in all by ninety-three persons, many

of whom were compelled to lie upon the bare floor, through inability to provide a bed for themselves; in several rooms on the chapel stairs men and women, sick and ill, lay on the floor without a rag to cover them; the warden, not satisfied with extracting large sums of money, had locked them in filthy cells in default of payment, had caused them to be manacled, and when they died, had appropriated to his own use any effects which they had possessed.<sup>1</sup>

Sydney says—

It would require more space than here can be afforded to enumerate a tithe of the enormities that had been practised in that foul den. Of the instruments of torture which had been employed by the warden, it is enough to say that when they were produced for the inspection of the committee, they caused a thrill of horror to run through all who were present.

As to the 'strong room' in the prison, the following description, taken from the Report of the Visiting Committee, must suffice—

This place is like a vault, like those in which the dead are interred, and wherein the bodies of persons dying in the said prison are usually deposited till the coroner's inquest hath passed upon them; it has no chimney nor fireplace, nor any light but what comes over the door or through a hole of about eight inches square. It is neither paved nor boarded, and the rough bricks appear both on the sides and top, being neither wainscoted nor plastered.

<sup>1</sup> Sydney, *England and the English*, vol. ii. pp. 308, 309.

## 70 The Revival of Religion in England

What adds to the dampness and stench of the place is its being built over the common sewer, and adjoining to the sink, and where all the nastiness of the prison is cast.

Twenty years later the noxious fumes emitted by Newgate prison attacked, and eventually killed, two judges, the Lord Mayor, one alderman, and others to the number of sixty persons and upwards, while sitting in the Old Bailey Sessions House. Carlyle would have considered this massacre as a broad suggestion on the part of nature concerning the brotherhood of man.

The work of General Oglethorpe casts a ray of light on the condition of the London prisons. But both in the metropolis and the provinces the state of the jails continued for many years to be infamous. After a considerable interval of time, John Howard, in Burke's fine phrase, commenced his 'circumnavigation of charity.' We have taken one illustration of prison life in the eighteenth century from London. We will take another from the West of England. In 1774, John Howard visited the Castle prison at Gloucester, and found it in a wretched condition. The floor of the main ward was so ruinous that it could not be washed; the male and female felons were herded together in a single day-room; a large dunghill lay against the steps leading to the dormitories, and the jailer, having no salary, made his living out of the profits of the liquor sold to the prisoners, and by taxing the debtors brought under

his charge. Howard noted that many prisoners died there in the course of the year. Newgate prison, in Bristol, was overcrowded with inmates, but was in a better sanitary state than that of Gloucester, though the 'dungeon' or night-room for male felons, often densely crowded, was eighteen steps underground and only seventeen feet in diameter. Howard's note is: 'No bedding, nor straw.' In the yard the criminals of all ages and both sexes mingled with the insolvent debtors; even the poorest of the latter class paying the jailer, who had no salary, tenpence halfpenny a week for the lodgings in which they were incarcerated by their creditors. At the time of Howard's visit there were thirty-eight felons and fifty-eight debtors in Newgate. Bridewell was in a worse state than the jail, the rooms being very dirty, and the air offensive from open sewers. There was no bedding, no employment, insufficient water, and the only food was two pennyworth of bread 'per head daily. At Lawford's Gate Bridewell there was—

a dark room, the dungeon, about twelve feet by seven, in which the felons slept, except those who could afford to pay for beds. The rooms were without chimneys, and yet the inmates were never allowed to leave them. A prisoner had no allowance for food, except where he was very poor, when he had twopence a day.<sup>1</sup>

Our knowledge of the condition of the prisons of England does not arise exclusively from the revelation

<sup>1</sup> Latimer's *Annals of Bristol*, pp. 406, 407.



## 72 The Revival of Religion in England

of General Oglethorpe's commission and from the reports of John Howard. In the eighteenth century they were the scenes of the constant visits of the Wesleys and of Whitefield, and from the pages of their journals abundant materials for constructing the repulsive picture of prison life in England during the eighteenth century may be gleaned. Their work was continued, under more favourable circumstances at the beginning of the next century by Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, whose self-denying labours at last produced some impression upon the minds of those who were responsible for the treatment of debtors and criminals. The comparative failure of the attempts made by Oglethorpe and Howard to effect permanent reforms in the jails of the country strengthens our conviction that a condemnatory verdict must be cast against the humanity of the ruling classes of England in the eighteenth century.

We have seen that, in the eighteenth century, England was a country of isolated towns and lonely villages. In addition, we have noted that, taking London as an example, the towns were divided into independent sections by the estrangement of class from class, and by a striking lack of sympathy. It is sympathy that knits a people together. Where it is absent, national character suffers. Our moral faults have no mercy on our social life. They wound it at every point, and constantly threaten it with destruction. If it had not been for the coming

of a day when Englishmen saw each other in a new light, when, to their surprise, they discovered that they were brethren, the history of this country would have been a story of the withering of all social virtues, and of the perishing of all that is most God-like in man.

## III

## The Moral Condition of England

HAVING glanced at the social condition of England, we will now consider the grave subject of the state of morals in this country in the eighteenth century. In the treatment of this question care is necessary. A writer who has to describe a national revival of religion is in danger of blackening his shadows. That danger should be seen and avoided. There is no need to deepen the gloom in order to increase the intensity of the brightness. All the facts should be kept steadily in view. In the eighteenth century we can find many pictures of pure domestic life. The figures of men and women, radiant with the quiet light of a true saintliness, pass before our eyes. The constant preaching of a Christian morality in the churches produced decisive effects on conscience and conduct. The praise of virtue led to its practice in innumerable English homes. These facts must not be overlooked. We appreciate them fully, and their remembrance relieves the darkness of the picture which candour compels us to paint.

Our inquiry concerns the general condition of morals in England during the reigns of the Georges, and especially in the period before the Great Revival had exerted its utmost force in this country.

The character of a people can be judged by its amusements. The chief amusement of English Society in the eighteenth century was provided by the theatre. It is important to discover the estimate of theatrical managers of that day concerning the taste of the people for whom they catered. No men knew more accurately the innermost mind of the play-going public. They selected the things which would attract, and their selection proceeded upon a profound knowledge of the current thought and character of the people. There were some managers who discerned the better side of human nature, and appealed to it. They were convinced that by pertinacity and genius they could make the stage one of the great educational forces of the day. We cannot withhold our admiration from these men, neither can we deny them our compassion. In the eighteenth century we greet with respect the figure of David Garrick. With a superb courage, and with a prodigal expenditure, he fought against the evils which had dragged the stage through the mire. He succeeded in cleansing it from some of its most startling evils. It is undoubted that his example has been an inspiration to some of our modern playwrights and managers. But, as we have said, we pay him the meed of our compassion. The battle was too hard, and gradually



## 76 The Revival of Religion in England

it broke him down. He rescued a plot from the desert, and made it bright with blossoms; but round his tiny garden the rank weeds grew. When a little plot of cultivated ground lies in a weedy wilderness, we know its doom.

In speaking of the condition of the English theatre in the eighteenth century, we will not forget Garrick and those who shared with him the arduous toils of the Shakespearean revival. We think that it is scarcely fair to judge the stage by the testimonies of those who have a violent prejudice against theatrical performances. We therefore select our witnesses from the ranks of those who do not suffer from this defect. Lecky, who regrets the opposition of religious people to the theatre, admits that, in the eighteenth century, although English play-writers borrowed very largely from the French, the English stage was far inferior to that of France in decorum, modesty, and morality.<sup>1</sup> No one can deny that Lecky delivers his verdict with remarkable self-restraint. Let us listen to a man who lived in the eighteenth century, and who was himself a writer of plays. Addison, in the *Spectator* of 1712, confesses that it was one of the most unaccountable things in that age, that the lewdness of the theatre should be so much complained of, so well exposed, and so little redressed.

As matters stand at present [he says] multitudes are shut out from this noble diversion by reason of those

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, vol. i. p. 540.

abuses and corruptions that accompany it. A father is often afraid that his daughter should be ruined by those entertainments which were invented for the accomplishment and refining of human nature. . . . The accomplished gentleman upon the English stage is the person that is familiar with other men's wives and indifferent to his own, as the fine woman is generally a composition of sprightliness and falsehood.

It may be said that Addison wrote before Garrick's attempt to purify the stage. That is so ; but Garrick's success may be easily exaggerated. Speaking of the year 1782, Sydney says—

With regard to the character of the plays, this much only needs be said, that, although Garrick and others worked hard during the second half of the century to eliminate the coarse, obscene, and scandalous elements which entered only too largely into the composition of many of them, the state of the stage was very far from satisfactory, even in the closing decades of the century, although, by that time, the stream of public opinion was being fairly directed against the coarseness by which it had been so long disfigured.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Wendeborn, whose love of theatrical performances made him lenient in his judgement, says—

The English stage has been blamed, particularly during the reign of Charles II, for being exceedingly licentious ; but it has been, in this respect, much reformed ; though there occur frequently such expressions and *double entendres*

<sup>1</sup> *England and the English*, vol. i. p. 165.

## 78 The Revival of Religion in England

as may put modesty to the blush ; which, however, seem not to be disliked by the majority even of female spectators, who either bestow a smile upon them, or hide their titter behind their fans.<sup>1</sup>

If an audience may be judged by a play, a play may also be judged by an audience. What was the character of the people who trooped into the theatres in the eighteenth century ? Writing in 1786, Dr. Wendeborn says—

The great propensity of the present English to see plays of all kinds performed ; the crowded play-houses in London ; the private theatres, and the spouting clubs make a fine contrast with the times in which Dryden lived. It might, perhaps, be wished, for the sake of morality, that the reservedness and seriousness of that age were not, as it seems, totally given up. Numbers of women of easy virtue are to be seen within the theatres, and in the avenues leading to them, which contributes not a little to increase that immorality which play-houses are said to promote. Formerly, this class of females, when they frequented the theatre, were obliged to wear either masks or hats with a black crape, and they were not admitted into every part of the house. At present, they are seen in numbers in the boxes, or any division of the house, among the rest of the company, without the least distinctive mark, impudence perhaps excepted. Nay, they often give the *ton* in dress, and in an easy and free deportment, to those of their sex who are reputed modest ; so that it is attended with some difficulty to distinguish innocence lost from that which is supposed still to exist.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A View of England*, vol. ii. p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii. pp. 261, 262.

Lest it should be said that this description of the audience in an English theatre bears the marks of a foreigner's spite, we will quote the words of Sydney. He says—

The reader would err, and that very considerably, were he to suppose that it was the attractions of the stage that induced the majority of fine gentlemen in the last century to resort to the three principal theatres in London. Contemporary light literature bears its emphatic testimony to the fact that it was the attractions presented by the saloons of the play-houses, establishments which partook as much of the nature of brothels as they did of taverns, which filled the benches of the theatres with visitors, and the purses of those who kept them with the coin of the realm. The existence of these resorts was the chief inducement for hundreds of men, old and young, to resort to Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket Theatres.<sup>1</sup>

Weighing the evidence we have collected, and giving due allowance for the reforms introduced by David Garrick, we see no reason to dispute the substantial accuracy of John Wesley's verdict, that the English theatre of his day was 'the sink of all profaneness and debauchery.'

The classes which had some claim to be considered educated found their amusement not only at the theatre, but in the perusal of the books which poured from the 'Minerva Press.' These were eagerly devoured, and the character of the readers may be gauged by the novels they read.

<sup>1</sup> *England and the English*, vol. i. p. 161.



## 80 The Revival of Religion in England

Jeffrey, in his *Essays*, describing these books, says—

A greater mass of trash and rubbish never disgraced the press of any country than the ordinary novels that filled and supported circulating libraries down nearly to the time of Miss Edgeworth's first appearance. . . . The staple of our novel market was beyond imagination despicable, and had consequently sunk and degraded the whole department of literature, of which it had usurped the name.

Sydney informs us that 'these trashy productions' were, in most cases, the composition of women; and their plots turned chiefly upon amorous intrigue. 'Rotten is the one adjective that, with some few exceptions, best describes them one and all.' He continues—

The perusal of these detestable novels was, in great measure, the sole recreation of young people of either sex whose education had been utterly neglected, or of persons whose morbid cravings after excitement could be satisfied by no other means.

Novel-reading was one of the chief employments of women, and the quickest way to coarsen the moral fibre of a nation is to pollute the minds of its women. Speaking of the general literature of the period, Overton, in *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, says—

Notwithstanding the improvement which such writers as Addison and Steele had effected, it was still very impure. Let us take the evidence of the kindly and well-informed Sir Walter Scott: 'We should do great injustice to the present day by comparing our manners with those of the reign of George I. The writings, even of the most

esteemed poets of that period, contain passages which now would be accounted to deserve the pillory. Nor was the tone of conversation more pure than that of composition; for the taint of Charles II's reign continued to infect society until the present reign [George III], when, if not more moral, we are at least more decent.'<sup>1</sup>

While mawkish women were enervating themselves with sentimentality, and besmirching their minds with the scenes and suggestions of infamous novels, their fathers and brothers pursued a more exciting form of pleasure. The men of the eighteenth century have an evil reputation for their passion for gaming. That passion was cultivated and inflamed by the rulers of the nation. The State lotteries affected thousands of men and women, and filled them with a burning desire for gain. The patronage of lotteries continued until the latter end of the eighteenth century, and we agree with Sydney when he says: 'Of all the baneful things that the evil propensities of Government ever induced it to patronize, assuredly they were the worst.'<sup>2</sup>

When we get a clear sight of the men of the time, we cease to wonder at the action of Parliament. Both Houses of the Legislature were filled with gamblers. The name of Charles James Fox springs up in the mind at once. Before he had reached his twenty-fourth year he was indebted to the Jews for something like £100,000, which he had lost at cards and dice.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *England and the English*, vol. i. p. 224.

## 82 The Revival of Religion in England

Gibbon says that Fox strengthened himself for the memorable debate in the House of Commons on the relief of the clergy from subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles by indulging in a twenty-two hours' recreation at hazard, at the cost of £500 per hour—that is £11,000 in all. Pitt, at one period of his life, was a keen gamester. At the Boar's Head, Eastcheap, he made a great impression on William Wilberforce by the intense earnestness which he displayed when joining in games of chance. But Pitt perceived his danger in time, and, by a strong effort of will, broke loose from the gaming-table, and abandoned it for ever. It is strange to watch William Wilberforce at Brooks's so late as 1780, sitting at the faro-table, where George Selwyn kept the bank. He explains that he joined in play 'from mere shyness.' But the fascination seized him, and it was not until he won £600, 'much of it lost by those who were only heirs to future fortune,' that 'the pain he felt at their annoyance cured him of a taste which seemed but too likely to become predominant.'

Diverting our glance from the Legislature, we find that the whole of English society was infected with the passion for gaming. Trevelyan, in his *Early Life of C. J. Fox*, declares that—

Society was one vast casino. On whatever pretext and under whatever circumstances half a dozen people of fashion found themselves together, whether for music, or dancing, or politics, or for drinking the waters or each

other's wine, the box was sure to be rattling, and the cards were being cut and shuffled.<sup>1</sup>

Beneath the level of 'Society,' the same craze for games of chance existed. There is no reason to doubt the correctness of the assertion that it may be fairly questioned whether the passion for gambling ever wielded such absolute sway in any country as it did in England during the whole of the eighteenth century.

Let us apply another test to the character of the English people in the eighteenth century. The character of a nation is revealed by the manner in which it treats the lower animals. Since the eighteenth century we have learned reverence for that which is beneath us. The virtue of humaneness has appeared in the English character, and its advent signifies much in the eyes of a man who knows how to test the moral progress of a people. At the time of which we write, in town and country, one of the most popular forms of public amusement was cock-fighting. The pencil of Hogarth has made us realize the scenes of cruelty that were enacted in order to give a mild excitement to dull country squires and debauched men about town. In Hogarth's picture of the cock-pit there is one figure that specially impresses us. It is that of a Frenchman, who is turning away from the brutal spectacle with an expression of unqualified disgust. Our insular pride is wounded by this keen touch of the

<sup>1</sup> p. 89.



## 84 The Revival of Religion in England

satirist's pencil. Latimer, in his *Annals of Bristol* records the occurrence of great cock-fights. In March, 1724, a match took place between the 'gentlemen' of Bath and Bristol. The stakes were six guineas on each battle, and sixty guineas on the concluding fight. The tournament extended over three days. The 'gentlemen' of the two cities must have been glutted with blood.<sup>1</sup> In February, 1778, a fight took place at the Ostrich Inn, Durdham Down. It was attended by a great number of country squires, the match having been arranged between the gentry of Somerset and Devon. Fifty-one birds contended on each side, for prizes amounting to about 350 guineas.<sup>2</sup> In April, 1786, there was a great cock-fighting tournament in Bristol. The promoters were the gentry of Gloucestershire and Dorset. The stakes were £350, and the betting was heavy. In Leicester, in the closing years of the eighteenth century, it is on record that as many as one hundred cocks were slain in the course of a single day.

What strikes us in reading the descriptions of eighteenth-century cock-fighting, is the fact that the nation at large seemed utterly unable to feel any disgust at the scenes in the pit. It is singular that the sport was considered so harmless that boys might enjoy it without rebuke. At Wimborne School, an annual cock-fight was held with the approval of the masters.<sup>3</sup> The pastime was numbered among the

<sup>1</sup> Latimer's *Annals*, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> p. 432.

<sup>3</sup> p. 25.

recreations of some of the clergy. In 1656 Parson Allambrige, of Monkton Farleigh, fought a main of cocks with a neighbour, and was so delighted by his victory that he recorded it in the parish register.<sup>1</sup> The mantle of this clerical sportsman seems to have fallen on Samuel Creswicke, the Dean of Bristol in 1730, and the incumbent of St. James's Church in that city. In 1739 he was promoted to the deanery of Wells, holding still his Bristol parish. At his residence, Haydon, near Wells, he ordered a cock-pit to be constructed, so that he and his guests could witness the 'sport' from his dining-room, the window of which was enlarged for the purpose.<sup>2</sup> Roberts, in his *Social History of the Southern Counties*,<sup>3</sup> informs us that the church bells at times announced the winning of a long main.

At one time bear-baiting was a favourite amusement in England. It was enjoyed more especially by 'gentlemen,' but the rabble entered with great zest into the 'sport.' But the bear disappeared from the arena in favour of the bull. Throughout the whole of the eighteenth century bulls were tortured to make an English holiday. In London, in Queen Anne's time, they were baited twice a week; and Lecky tells us that there was no provincial town to which the practice did not extend.

It was regarded on the Continent as peculiarly English. The tenacity of the English bull-dog, which would

<sup>1</sup> Latimer's *Annals*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> p. 421.

## 86 The Revival of Religion in England

sometimes suffer itself to be cut to pieces rather than relax its hold, was a favourite subject of national boasting, while French writers pointed to the marked difference in this respect between the French and English taste as a conclusive proof of the higher civilization of their own nation.<sup>1</sup>

The torture of animals for amusement is one of the most hideous forms of human cruelty. Prize-fighting between men, in comparison with it, is an innocent form of physical exercise. But the eighteenth century could not allow even this form of amusement to stand in its native simplicity. The readers of the newspapers, in the first half of the century, often caught sight of the advertised challenges of women. Sydney reproduces advertisements from the *London Journal* and the *Daily Post* in confirmation of this fact. As the nation was callous to the spectacles of the cock-pit and bull-ring, it is scarcely necessary to say that it was indifferent to the batterings of a prize-fight. All the evidence shows that the sport was not considered brutal. We presume that some fastidious persons objected to look at the combat between the Stoke Newington ass-driver and the European championess, or the contest in which 'the famous boxing woman of Billingsgate' pounded her adversary; but, as to the fights between men, even members of Parliament held that they were conducive to manliness, and that the national character and the constitutional liberties of the country were closely bound up with them.

<sup>1</sup> Lecky's *History*, vol. i. p. 552.

According to Dr. Wendeborn,<sup>1</sup> some foreigners were accustomed to call the English 'the wild nation of Europe,' and notwithstanding the natural resentment we feel at the criticism, it must be admitted that, in the eighteenth century, we deserved the epithet. The 'wildness' of the English people was especially illustrated, in times of excitement, by the swift gathering and desperate onslaught of the mob. Fielding calls the English rabble the 'Fourth Estate.' There were occasions, such as the Sacheverell, the Wilkes, and the Lord Gordon riots, when the mob ruled London. Outside the metropolis the rabble often reigned. In the provincial towns there seemed always to be a large number of people who, on provocation, would break out into tumults, disgraced by murder and the burning of the houses of obnoxious persons. In many places the magistrates were held in contempt. As for the constables, instead of hunting they were hunted. Nothing tamed the madness of the mob save the sight of soldiers and a discharge of musketry. Then the coward, so often latent in the rioter, revealed himself, and the crowd scattered and ran for its hiding-places. The mob also existed in sparsely-peopled neighbourhoods. By some evil instinct the most violent men and women of the villages got to know that some obnoxious person was coming into the district, and they swiftly assembled to drive him out with cudgels and brickbats. They gathered quickly, and gave themselves up to the luxury

<sup>1</sup> *A View of England*, vol. i. p. 364.



## 88 The Revival of Religion in England

of fury. The unbridled brutality of the English rabble may be traced, in part, to the indifference for the sufferings of other people which is acquired by long indulgence in cruel sport. There is not much difference between the baiting of a bear or a bull and the hounding of a man through a village street. In an age when gallant deeds on battlefields were common, we doubt whether any soldier displayed a finer heroism than was shown by the evangelists of the Great Revival, who, knowing their danger, stood in perfect peace in the midst of the raging ruffians who sought their lives.

We have tested the moral character of the people of England by the condition of the criminal code and by their amusements. In concluding our sketch of that condition we will avail ourselves of the keen eyes of John Wesley. He was a seer, and he had unparalleled opportunities for observing the state of the nation. His verdict was that the outstanding evils of his day were the prevailing habits of 'taking the name of God in vain, the profaning the day of the Lord, and drunkenness.' Wherever he rode, through city, town, or village, these were the signs which revealed the moral condition of England.

Let us take one of the 'evils' which Wesley indicates. The student of the moral condition of the people of England in the eighteenth century is especially impressed with the prevalence of drunkenness. It was a vice affecting all ranks of society.

The clubs, the coffee-houses, and the city taverns ministered to the corruption of the upper and middle classes, and the beer- and gin-shops intensified the miseries of the labourer and the herder in the slums. The vice desolated both town and country ; it mastered the English people in the eighteenth century.

Lecky, in his *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, gives a sketch of the rise and progress of this curse of our nation. Drunkenness extensively prevailed during the time when beer was the ordinary beverage of the people. But the starting-point of our career as a pre-eminently drunken race is to be found in the early Hanoverian period, when gin-drinking began to be the rage in this country. Under Charles I a company was formed with the sole right of making spirits and vinegar in the cities of London and Westminster, and within twenty-one miles of the same. Other distilleries were subsequently started ; but, according to Lecky, up to the time of the Revolution their number was inconsiderable. In 1689, in order to exclude French brandies, the importation of spirits from all foreign countries was absolutely prohibited ; and the trade of distilling, on the payment of certain duties, was thrown open to all English subjects. For a time the consequences of this fatal step were not seen. In the days when French-made brandies were imported, they were so expensive that they were consumed, almost exclusively, by the moneyed classes. But the spirits produced in English distilleries were purchasable by

## 90 The Revival of Religion in England

all sections of the population; and spirit-drinking gradually became a habit in England. Lecky mentions 1724 as the year when gin-drinking began to spread with 'the rapidity and the violence of an epidemic.' He says—

Small as is the place which this fact occupies in English history, it was probably, if we consider all the consequences that have flowed from it, the most momentous in that of the eighteenth century—incomparably more so than any event in the purely political or military annals of the country. The fatal passion for drink was at once, and irrevocably, planted in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

The progress in the drinking of spirits at this period may be gauged from the following facts: In 1684 the average of British spirits distilled was 527,000 gallons. In 1714 the quantity rose to 2,000,000; in 1727 to 3,601,000; and in 1735 to 5,394,000 gallons. In 1742 more than 7,000,000 gallons were distilled. In 1750 and 1751 more than 11,000,000 gallons of spirits were annually consumed.

With these figures before us, we can understand the indignant words which were uttered by humane men who watched the physical deterioration of the English race. The London physicians stated that, in 1750, there were in and about the metropolis no less than fourteen thousand cases of illness, most of them beyond the reach of medicine, directly attributable to gin. Fielding, in his pamphlet *On the late Increase*

<sup>1</sup> *History*, vol. i. p. 479.

*of Robbers*, declared that 'gin was the principal sustenance of more than a hundred thousand people in the metropolis,' and he predicted that 'should the drinking of this poison be continued at its present height during the next twenty years, there will, by that time, be very few of the common people left to drink it.' It seems to be a well-authenticated fact that retailers of gin were accustomed to hang out painted boards, announcing that their customers could be made drunk for a penny, dead drunk for twopence, and that they should have straw to lie upon for nothing. Cellars, strewn with straw, were accordingly provided, into which those who had become insensible were dragged, and where they remained until they had sufficiently recovered to renew their orgies.

It must not be supposed that Parliament was wholly indifferent to the prevalence of the evil which the Legislature had, in a sense, created. In 1736 Sir J. Jekyll brought in and carried a measure imposing a duty of twenty shillings a gallon on all spirituous liquors, and prohibiting any person from selling them in less quantities than two gallons without paying a tax of £50 a year. This stringent law produced violent riots, and created a clandestine trade. In 1749 more than four thousand persons were convicted of selling spirituous liquors without a licence, and it was estimated that more than seventeen thousand private gin-shops existed within the Bills of Mortality. In 1751 a measure was carried in Parliament which



## 92 The Revival of Religion in England

had a considerable effect on the liquor trade. Distillers were prohibited, under a penalty of £10, from either retailing spirituous liquors themselves, or selling them to unlicensed retailers. Debts contracted for liquors, not amounting to twenty shillings at a time, were made irrecoverable by law. Retail licences were conceded only to £10 householders within the Bills of Mortality, and to traders, who were subject to certain parochial rates, without them; and the penalties for unlicensed retailing were greatly increased. For the second offence the clandestine dealer was liable to three months' imprisonment and to whipping; for the third offence he incurred the penalty of transportation. Two years later another useful law was carried, restricting the liberty of magistrates in issuing licences, and subjecting public-houses to severe regulations. Lecky considers that these later Acts improved the morals and physical health of the people, but, he says, 'these measures formed a palliation, and not a cure; and from the early years of the eighteenth century, gin-drinking has never ceased to be the main counteracting influence to the moral, intellectual, and physical benefits that might be expected from increased commercial prosperity.'<sup>1</sup>

The destructive effects of drinking spirituous liquors are graphically depicted in Hogarth's picture of Gin Lane. It is a little bit of eighteenth-century London cut out as a specimen of scenes which were being

<sup>1</sup> *History*, vol. i. pp. 481, 482.

enacted over the whole country. Dr. Martin Benson, the Bishop of Gloucester, writing to Bishop Berkeley in 1752, says: 'Our people are now become—what they never before were—cruel and inhuman. Those accursed spirituous liquors, which, to the shame of our Government, are so easily to be had, and in such quantities drunk, have changed the very nature of our people. And they will, if continued to be drunk, destroy the very race of the people themselves.'<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to trace the evils produced by drunkenness. It is a vice which never stands alone. One effect, however, is sufficiently conspicuous. We have mentioned the creation of a clandestine trade in spirituous liquors which was produced by the action of Parliament. When the Government of the Revolution took the false step of 'encouraging the home industry' of distilling, they were blind to the fact that another step would soon have to be taken. When the liquor trade is fostered, it flourishes so prodigiously that restraints have to be applied to it lest it should rule the country and endanger the morals and health of the people. But when a Government has so legislated as to create a taste, a passion, for strong drink, its subsequent efforts to restrain the evil it has created meet with strenuous resistance. When the Government remedy is increased taxation, which either raises the price of liquor or impairs its quality, then an effort will be made to obtain strong spirits

<sup>1</sup> Sydney, *England and the English*, vol. i. pp. 62, 63.

## 94 The Revival of Religion in England

that are cheap because they have escaped duty. It seemed like a nemesis that the French brandy which was so obnoxious to the Government that it determined to shut it out by encouraging home distilleries, should have been a means of setting on foot a contraband trade that produced innumerable evils in English life. Nor was this all. Holland was ready to send any quantity of gin into England. Round our coasts, as a direct consequence of the action of the Government, smugglers' boats ran into creek and cove, and immense quantities of duty-free spirits were landed, and conveyed by pack-horses to the towns and villages of England. Dr. Wendeborn says—

I have frequently seen, on the public roads leading to London at midday, gangs of smugglers, between fifteen and twenty, mounted on the best horses, provided with pistols and cutlasses, carrying their contraband goods behind their saddles in packages, and sufficiently resolute to repel any excise or custom-house officers who should attempt to stop them. If these should happen to have soldiers along with them for assistance, bloody engagements will ensue, and many on both sides will lose their lives.<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt that the life of the smuggler lends itself to picturesque description; but those who recognize the fact that the smuggled ankers of brandy and Hollands were confirming Englishmen in their drunken habits see the black shadows that blot the sketches painted by graphic writers.

<sup>1</sup> *A View of England*, vol. i. p. 212.

It is impossible to challenge with any success the doleful descriptions which have been given of the moral condition of the masses of the people of England in the eighteenth century. Mark Pattison, in his essay on *Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688-1750*, expresses our own conviction when he says—

The historian of moral and religious progress is under the necessity of depicting the period as one of decay of religion, licentiousness of morals, public corruption, profaneness of language—a day of ‘rebuke and blasphemy.’ It was an age destitute of depth or earnestness ; an age whose poetry was without romance, whose philosophy was without insight, and whose public men were without character ; an age of ‘light without love,’ whose ‘very merits were of the earth, earthy.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, vol. ii. p. 42.



## IV

## The Religious Condition of England

**A**S there is so little dispute, in the present day, concerning the religious condition of England at the opening of the eighteenth century, we shall not make any attempt to give a minute description of that condition. We shall try to trace the admitted evils to their source; and we shall show that the paralysis of religion in this country is to be attributed to the unhealthy condition of the Churches. The story of the Church of England and of the Dissenting Churches during the eighteenth century is a story of lost ideals. It must, however, be remembered that the loss was not complete. In every Church, in every age, there are saints of the Lord who are immune against the evils which surround them. It is pleasant to meet them in the byways of history. In all times there have been men and women who have diligently trimmed the household lamp of domestic piety, and ministers of God who have guarded the flickering flame in the temple of the Lord. A kindly light, streaming from pure and lovely Christian lives,

relieves the gloom that settled upon the Churches in the dark days of the eighteenth century.

In speaking of Dr. Samuel Johnson, Carlyle, in his lectures on 'Heroes,' says that 'his fatal misery was the spiritual paralysis of the age in which his life lay, whereby his life, too, do what he might, was half paralysed.' The phrase 'spiritual paralysis' correctly describes the condition of religious life in the eighteenth century. In accounting for that condition it is usual to insist upon the prevalence of doubt and of indifference to divine things, and to trace such doubt and indifference to the effects that were produced by the Deistic controversy. We do not undervalue the desolating effects of that sharp contention; but 'the spiritual paralysis of the age' cannot be wholly attributed to it. We think that Sir Leslie Stephen, in his *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, has estimated the influence of the Deistic controversy correctly. He says—

The main result of the attack and defence was to lower the general tone of religious feeling without destroying the respect for established creeds; to make men unwilling to ask awkward questions, and to compound with their consciences by not making arrogant assumptions; and, generally, to bring about a comfortable compromise, which held together till Wesley from one side, and Paine from another, forced more serious thoughts upon the age.<sup>1</sup>

It is a mistake to explain the decay of the spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. pp. 272, 273.

## 98 The Revival of Religion in England

force of Christian Churches by the prevalence of scepticism. The student of Church history knows that doubters have always confronted the teachers of the Christian religion. Strictly speaking, there has never been 'an age of faith.' Speculative scepticism, practical atheism, militant or contemptuous godlessness have always had their representatives, who have bitterly assailed the Church. But the Church, so long as it has been true to the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles, so long as it has maintained its evangelistic experience and testimony, so long as it has been spiritual and unworldly, has never suffered permanently from the attack of the sceptic: The secret of the partial success of Deism was that the Christian Church in this country had almost lost its power of resistance. The intellectual battle was fought by the champions of orthodoxy with much keenness, and with conspicuous success. But an intellectual victory over those who assail the Church does not, of itself, fortify the spiritual life of the spectators who watch the tournament and applaud the conquerors. Something more is required. If the Church in the eighteenth century had been true to the ideals of the New Testament, the Deistic controversy might have caused a flutter in the minds of those people who were afraid of religious discussion, but the fighting strength of the Church would have been sufficient, not only to repel attacks, but to secure an unquestioned victory.

The principal cause of the decay of religion in

England in the eighteenth century is to be found in the character of the Christian ministers of that day. 'Like priest, like people,' is a maxim which can be turned about, and which reflects light from both sides. It is true that the people make the priest, if he is weak enough to be influenced by them; but it is even more certain that the priest makes the people. If we accept this fact we shall find the reason of 'the spiritual paralysis' that had enfeebled the age which was vitalized by the energy of the Evangelical Revival.

In his *Life in the English Church, 1660-1714*, Overton shows that the chief impediment in the way of the spiritual progress of the Church in the reign of Queen Anne was the inextricable confusion which existed between civil and ecclesiastical affairs. He says—

Politics have constantly been the bane of Church life, and never more so than in the reign of Queen Anne. Many of the so-called Church questions which violently agitated men's minds were really far more of a political than of an ecclesiastical character. The fact is, that though it is exceedingly doubtful whether the State was of much use to the Church, there is no doubt that the Church was of very great use to the State; it was a name to conjure with, and it was used accordingly. Nothing marks more strongly the popularity of the Church of this period than the evident fact that no one had the least chance of a hearing unless he professed friendship for, or at least no hostility to, her. Those who were her bitterest enemies assumed an apologetic tone. If the Church did not take as much advantage as might have been expected of the



## 100 The Revival of Religion in England

splendid opportunity which now seemed to be offered to her, the reason was that she was too much absorbed in the vortex of politics.<sup>1</sup>

These words are descriptive of the Church of England in the reign of Queen Anne, but Overton's testimony is that in the eighteenth century the Church was 'an immense engine of political power'; and he tells us that—

the bench of bishops formed so compact a phalanx in the Upper House of the Legislature, and the clergy could and did influence so many elections into the Lower House, that the Church had necessarily to be courted and favoured, often to the great detriment of her spiritual character.<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to note the currents which carried the State Church into 'the vortex of politics.' As more light is poured upon the Reformation in England the more clearly do we see that it was not so much a reformation of character as of opinions concerning important doctrines and ceremonies. The reformation was partial; everywhere the eye detects the mark of compromise. One discovery of the age, however, stands out conspicuously. The civil and ecclesiastical statesmen of the time were convinced that it was essential that the theory of the headship of the Church should be settled, and that such headship should not be found in the Pope of Rome. Notwithstanding the manifest unfitness of Henry VIII for the position, they invented

<sup>1</sup> pp. 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 6.

the doctrine that the King is the head of the Church. This was no doubt an astute move on the part of the statesmen of the day. The claims of the King were pitted against those of the Pope, and an issue was raised that could be understood by the average mind. The solution of the problem did not satisfy all Englishmen. There were certain keen-sighted men who held that, if the spiritual character of the Church was to be maintained, the head of the Church must be invisible save to the eye of faith. They contended that Jesus Christ was the King of kings and the Head of His Church on earth and in heaven. But, in such an age as that of the Reformation, the form of religion was not settled by the most spiritual men, but by the Court clergy and the politicians. They, we suppose, assented to the doctrine of the headship of Christ as a pious and venerable opinion, but they saw that it was unsuited to the grave national crisis that had arisen. It was no use to proclaim such a spiritual doctrine to a nation that put off its faith so quickly in the reign of Henry VIII, and assumed it again, with equal swiftness, in the time of Mary. The human imagination had to be struck, and the King was selected to strike it. He became a battle-standard around which the fight raged nearly down to the reign of Queen Anne. It would be difficult to estimate the injury to the spiritual and evangelizing work of the Church which resulted from the prolonged controversy concerning the ecclesiastical position of the King.

## 102 The Revival of Religion in England

The doctrine of the headship of the Church being settled, the influence of the Court began to tell upon the character of the clergy with disastrous effect. So long as the King was a Protestant the mischievous character of the doctrine was obscured; but when Charles II and James II reigned it was startlingly revealed. A Roman Catholic King, at the head of a Protestant Church, is an anomaly that produces complications. This was discovered; and for years the country was restive under the arrangement. In the reign of James II it became intolerable, and clerical and lay politicians combined to end it. The student of those distant years watches the conspiracies, the intrigues, and the secret negotiations of bishops and clergymen with mixed feelings. The work that was accomplished brought permanent benefit to the Church and the nation, but we cannot repress the conviction that these clerical conspirators would have been better employed in preaching the gospel and in seeking the salvation of the souls of men.

A striking result of the doctrine of the King's headship was the creation of that spirit of servility in the clergy which was so painfully manifested in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It infected some of the noblest men in the Church. One of the most pitiful spectacles ever witnessed was the scene in the death-chamber of Charles II, when, after the King had blessed the little Duke of Richmond, his illegitimate child, the bishops who were present moved him

‘as he was the Lord’s anointed, and the father of his country, to bless them also, and all that were there present, and in them the whole body of his subjects.’ Whereupon, we are told, ‘the room being full, all fell down upon their knees, and he raised himself in his bed, and he very solemnly blessed them all.’ It cuts us to the quick to see in this kneeling company the saintly Bishop Ken. At the time when the King bestowed his blessing on this group of Protestant clergymen he was, according to the testimony of the Duchess of Portsmouth, one of his mistresses, ‘a Catholic at the bottom of his heart’; and shortly afterwards a Romish priest was smuggled into his room, and the King received ‘his viaticum with all the symptoms of devotion imaginable.’<sup>1</sup> The ‘gay monarch’s’ blessing of the bishops is a saddening episode in the history of the English Church.

The scene in the death-chamber of Charles II was symptomatic of much that then, and for many years afterwards, existed in England. The subserviency of the clergy to the King was remarkable. There was a reason. He held their ecclesiastical fortunes in his hands. The ambitious men who were consumed with a passion for preferment knew that their only hope of attaining to positions of dignity lay in standing well with the Court. The yearning for preferment is one of the most marked characteristics of the clergy of the period. There were splendid exceptions. We may

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Thomas Ken*, by a Layman, pp. 157, 160.



## 104 The Revival of Religion in England

not sympathize with the principles of the non-juring bishops and clergymen in the reign of William and Mary, but we cannot withhold our admiration from the men who, having sworn the oath of allegiance to James II, refused, out of conscience, to take a similar oath to his successors. The healthiness of their conscience is still a subject of academic debate, but there can be no doubt that they valued their convictions so highly that they descended from their places of dignity and became poor men; dependent, some of them, all their days on the bounty of others. Upon them, in a mean and sordid age, when conscience was often treated by self-seekers with reckless audacity, a pleasant light rests, a light that cheers the gloom of the seventeenth century.

The facts which illustrate the preferment-hunting habits of the clergy of the eighteenth century are abundant. Canon Overton, in *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, speaks upon this subject with perfect frankness. Dealing with the scandalous practices of non-residence and the holding of pluralities he says—

Unhappily the bishops could not remonstrate against the evil, because the chief offenders were among their own order. It is perfectly astonishing to observe the lax views which even really good men seem to have held on this subject in the middle part of the century. Bishop Newton, the amiable and learned author of the *Dissertation on the Prophecies*, mentions it as an act of almost Quixotic

disinterestedness that, when he obtained the deanery of St. Paul's (that is, in addition to his bishopric), he resigned his living in the city, having held it for twenty-five years. In another passage he plaintively enumerates the various preferments he had to resign on taking the bishopric of Bristol. 'He was obliged to give up the prebend of Westminster, the precentorship of York, the lectureship of St. George's, Hanover Square, and the genteel office of sub-almoner.' On another occasion we find him conjuring his friend Bishop Pearce, of Rochester, not to resign the deanery of Westminster. 'He offered and urged all the arguments he could to dissuade the bishop from his purpose of separating the two preferments, which had been united for near a century, and lay so convenient to each other that neither of them would be of the same value without the other, and if once separated they might perhaps never be united again, and his successors might have reason to reproach and condemn his memory.' In another passage he complains of the diocese of Lincoln being 'so very large and laborious, so very extensive and expensive'; but the moral he draws is, not that it should be subdivided, so that its bishop might be able to perform his duties, but 'that it really requires and deserves a good commendam to support it with any dignity.'<sup>1</sup>

Mr. W. H. Hutton, writing about Newton in *The Guardian* for August 23, 1905, says—

In this old man's chit-chat the conversation always turns, sooner or later, on preferment; and we learn that it was from George III and his mother that the bishopric eventually came to him, when he was fifty-nine, though the Duke of Newcastle was not above claiming some share in the matter, for 'he had been so long used to shuffle and

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. p. 11.

## 106 The Revival of Religion in England

cut the cards, that he well knew how to pack them in such a way as to have the honours dealt to his particular friends.'

When he is a bishop there is hardly a word of his episcopal duties—still the tale is of this statesman and the other man of affairs. . . . Still the tale is of preferments, for every bishop, if we may take Newton for example, was on the look-out for translation ; and George Grenville said, ingenuously, that he considered bishoprics of two kinds—bishoprics of business for men of abilities and learning, and bishoprics of ease for men of family and fashion.

When we pass from the bishops to the clergy of inferior rank, we find the presence of the same fatal defects of character. In Mr. Albert Hartshorne's *Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain, 1729-1763*, the veil is lifted from the private life of the country clergy, and disclosures are made which assist us to understand the mystery of the extraordinary ineffectiveness of the national Church in the eighteenth century. The book contains the correspondence of Dr. Edmund Pyle, Chaplain-in-ordinary to George II, with Dr. Samuel Kerrich, vicar of Dersingham, rector of Wolferton and rector of West Newton. This book excites our disgust, but at the same time we are compelled to acknowledge its value as a revelation. It is written with an astounding frankness. Dr. Pyle pours into the ears of his correspondent stories which blight the character and spoil the reputation of men who had the misfortune of his acquaintance. Our first thought is that the acrid gossip is worthless ; but further knowledge

of the persons whom he describes leads us to the conclusion that, allowing due verge for the statements of an excitable newsmonger, sufficient truth remains to enable us to understand the life of a numerous section of the clergy of the period. In these letters we find, according to Mr. Hartshorne, 'notices of the clamouring crowd of self-seeking, clerical vultures'; we hear 'unseemly stories' of Bishop Mawson; we learn of the 'bartering' and 'managing' of Bishop Gooch; the 'wickedness' of Archbishop Stone; the 'violent language' of Bishop Butts; the 'rude ways' of Archbishop Blackburne; and the almost uniform neglect of the dioceses. But, above all else, we are introduced to Dr. Pyle himself. We see in him a man athirst for preferment, who is absolutely unfitted in spirit, character, and conduct for the position of a Christian minister. He is fatally irreverent, and contemptuous of the doctrines which he officially preached. We will content ourselves with one illustration. His father, Thomas Pyle, was the vicar of St. Margaret's Church in Lynn. The church was restored in 1743, and Thomas Pyle, who had been suffering from 'a violent hoarseness and oppression upon his lungs,' went out to see the new church, in which a magnificent pulpit was being put up. This is the way in which his son describes the visit: 'In going down the middle aisle he started back, on a sudden, at the sight of Trinity in Unity emblematically displayed in the front panel of the said pulpit, and, what with



## 108 The Revival of Religion in England

distemper and indignation, was almost suffocated. But nature, God be praised, got the better both of the mystery and the disease, and the conflict produced what physic had in vain attempted.' Recovering his voice, he indulged in 'a fit of as clear and audible raving as a man would wish to hear from a sound Protestant divine upon so provoking an occasion.'<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hartshorne says: 'In spite of the shock it caused to Thomas Pyle, the offending Trinity in Unity emblematically displayed was happily suffered to remain. It consists of the sacred monogram within a triangle, inlaid with different woods.'<sup>2</sup> Lest it should be supposed that this 'sound Protestant divine' was angered by the spectacle of a material symbol of the Deity in his church, it may be well to explain that Edmund Pyle acknowledges that 'his father scarcely disguised his Unitarian views.' Edmund Pyle 'was apparently worldly-wise enough to keep his heterodox principles somewhat to himself,' but there can be no doubt that his views differed little from those of his father.

Pyle was successful in his pursuit after preferment. On attaining the position of prebendary, a deep content spread through his soul. He expressed his feelings to a correspondent in the self-revealing words: 'The life of a prebendary is a pretty easy way of dawdling away one's time; praying, walking, visiting, and as little study as your heart could wish. A stall in this church is called a charming thing. And so it is.' He gave

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> p. 87.

himself up to the pleasures of the table, drinking 'astonishing' quantities of port, and hurrying from one mansion to another in his ceaseless round of pleasure. In him we cannot find a single characteristic of a true Christian minister.

In the *Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain* we catch sight of another clergyman who was a type of many whose figures flit across the pages of the book. John Hoadly was a younger son of the Bishop of Winchester—that prelate who, according to Macaulay, 'cringed from bishopric to bishopric.' He began life as a poet and dramatist, and assisted his brother, Benjamin Hoadly, in some of his dramatic writings. One of Benjamin Hoadly's plays was styled by a contemporary, 'Hoadly's Profligate Pantomime.' It was full of dissolute small-talk and indecent situations. It was whispered in the town that Bishop Hoadly had corrected it. If he left so much that excited disgust, what must the play have been when it first felt the touch of the episcopal pruning-knife? John Hoadly, being dazzled with the vision of the rich patronage in his father's gift, determined to enter the Church. His father ordained him deacon and priest, and Hartshorne tells that he was appointed at once chancellor of the diocese of Winchester, and chaplain in the household of the Prince of Wales. In 1737 he became rector of Mitchelmersh, in Hampshire, vicar of Wroughton, in Wiltshire, rector of Alresford, in Hampshire, and prebendary of Winchester. In 1743 he was made rector of St. Mary's, near Southampton,

## 110 The Revival of Religion in England

and in 1746 vicar of Overton, in Hampshire. With the exception of Wroughton, he received all these benefices from the hand of a benevolent father. In 1748 Archbishop Herring conferred on him the degree of LL.D., and in 1751 he was made chaplain in the household of the Princess Dowager. On the death of Dean Lynch, in 1760, Bishop Hoadly further appointed him to the Mastership of St. Cross. It seems incredible, but it is a fact that he retained all these preferments, except the vicarage of Wroughton and his prebendal stall, until his death. Hartshorne says that it was only Bishop Hoadly's lack of 'merit' with the Duke of Newcastle that prevented the further scandal of John Hoadly being made Dean of Winchester.<sup>1</sup>

When we move among the clergy of the eighteenth century, and see their character and the manner of their lives, we cease to wonder at the ineffectiveness of the Church they represented. Once more we remind ourselves that there were notable exceptions; but the weight of testimony is in favour of the fact that true-hearted Christian clergymen were in a minority, and that their influence was slight as compared with that wielded by the men who had only an official belief in their creed, and whose lives constantly brought reproach on the Christian religion.

In seeking to account for the decadence of Christianity in England during the eighteenth century, it is necessary to consider the condition of the Dissenting

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain*, pp. 268, 269.

Churches, and to determine whether they possessed sufficient spiritual force to impress, restrain, and uplift the people. According to the testimony of those who have most deeply studied this subject, such force was absent. They had once possessed it, but gradually they had been diverted from their mission, and had lost their power.

The point at which we must begin our study of Nonconformity in England is the period of the Reformation. At that time men had an opportunity of seeing an example of compromise in religion. It is customary to glorify compromise. It seems to smooth difficulties out of the way when discussion is keen, and when obstinate men on all sides need to be conciliated. But there is no finality in a compromise. It is the starting-point of new contention when other minds examine it, and when conscience asserts its rights over expediency. It was so in the days of the Reformation. Many persons looked with suspicion on the alloy of Romanism which politic statesmen left in the teaching and ceremonial practice of the English Church. Suspicion speedily turned to dislike, and to antagonism. Then arose the Nonconformist party, not outside, but within the Church; and the long fight began, which ended in the exclusion of that party, in 1662, by the application of the searching test of the Act of Uniformity.

It is always interesting to watch the attempt of earnest men to reform a Church to which they cling.



## 112 The Revival of Religion in England

English history teaches that a reforming Nonconformity in a Church has a brief and troubled life. When it becomes disagreeably aggressive it is extruded, or it exiles itself and begins its wanderings in the wilderness. This fate overtook some of the members of the Puritan party in the English Church immediately after the close of the reign of Edward VI. They set about the establishment of presbyteries, and made other arrangements for the inevitable exodus. But they were not inclined to leave the Church too suddenly. They remained in it as long as they could. At one time, to their gratification, they found themselves the dominant party in the Church of England; and, through the fortune of the Civil War, they were able to exhibit their strength by casting out the bishops and the episcopal clergy, and by imposing their own system of Presbyterianism on a restive Church. But their triumph was short. The end of the Commonwealth and the return of Charles II sounded the death-knell of their supremacy. Nothing remained for them, if they were not to trifle with conscience, but to depart from the Church. The attempt to Presbyterianize the Church of England failed, and the Presbyterians had to commence a separate career outside its borders.

We must distinguish between the Nonconformists and the Dissenters. The latter were the first to perceive that the spiritual reformation of the English people must be accomplished by men who did not shrink from the name of 'separatists.' Unless a man possesses

considerable self-esteem, he always finds it difficult to cut himself adrift from old associates, and from an established form of worship. But when intellect and conscience unitedly utter the exiling word, then, although the lonely path is entered with reluctance, it is pursued with firmness. Gradually the solitary traveller attracts to his side men of similar convictions. Then out of the association rises a form of ecclesiastical life, which slowly develops and takes its place among the Churches of England. The inquirer into Church origins generally finds something that commands his respect in the circumstances in which Christian Churches begin. He may not agree with the principles and convictions of their founders ; but, almost invariably, there is such a manifestation of the might of conscience, such a heroic endurance of suffering, such an aim after the things that are essential in the experience of a Christian man, that hostile criticism is hushed.

Paying our tribute of respect to the Nonconformists and Dissenters of Reformation times and the days of the Commonwealth, we must now ask, How was it that Churches, founded on conscience and faith, formed to combat error and to maintain the pure worship and Word of God, begun in order that the spiritual side of the Reformation might triumph over every subordinate aspect of that great revolution of Church life—how was it that these Churches, in the eighteenth century, were found, with rare exceptions, to have lost

## 114 The Revival of Religion in England

sight of their mission, and to have abandoned their work?

In trying to answer these questions we will take up the case of the Presbyterians. There can be no doubt that many of the men who were in favour of the Presbyterian form of church government were reformers of the best type. They commenced their work inside the Church of England, and fought with superb courage against the compromise in matters of faith and practice which had been arranged by the politicians and Court clergy who were chiefly responsible for the English Reformation. The Puritan Nonconformists began their work as early as the reign of Elizabeth. In the year 1574 an important work was published at Geneva. It was written in Latin, and was entitled *The Holy Discipline of the Church, Described in the Word of God*. Its author was Walter Travers, the famous afternoon lecturer at the Temple, who is well known as the distinguished disputant with Richard Hooker. This book was corrected, perfected, and translated into English by Thomas Cartwright, of whom John Wesley says: 'I look upon him, and the body of Puritans in that age, to have been both the most learned and the most pious men that were then in the English nation.' Cartwright's translation of Travers's book had a singular history. As it was being printed in Cambridge it was seized at the press, and Archbishop Whitgift directed that all the copies should be burnt as 'factious and seditious.' One copy escaped the flames.

It was found in Cartwright's study at his death ; and, in the year 1644, it was reprinted under the new title, *A Directory of Government Anciently contended for, and, as far as the Times would suffer, practised by the first Nonconformists in the days of Queen Elizabeth*. The *Directory* is reprinted as an appendix in Neal's *History of the Puritans*, and it well repays the study of those who wish to discern the spirit and aims of the first English Nonconformists.

In reading the *Directory* we are most impressed by those sections of the book which relate to the spiritual work of the Church. The place of doctrine and of discipline is accurately marked ; and it is clear that the supreme purpose of the organization of the Church is to secure the faithful preaching of the Word of God, and the salvation of those who were the members of the Church.

We have spoken of the spiritual aim of the early Puritans. In many of them the salvation of man was the ruling idea. Who can doubt the aim of Joseph Alleine, the author of the *Alarm to the Unconverted* ? The name of Richard Baxter stands out as that of a man who ever kept before him the principal duty of a Christian minister. His *Call to the Unconverted*, his *Saints' Everlasting Rest*, display the intensity of his zeal. It is a suggestive fact that, in this country, in a single year, twenty thousand copies of the *Call* were sold. Does not that show that there were myriads of people who were in sympathy with his evangelical convictions ?



## 116 The Revival of Religion in England

Oliver Heywood, the apostle of the north of England, was a man who aimed at and secured the conversion of his hearers. John Westley, the grandfather of the great agent in the Revival of the eighteenth century, was an evangelist whose ministry turned men from sin to God. Let any one who is eager to find the traces of the evangelical spirit in the seventeenth century read sympathetically Calamy's *Account of the Ministers who were ejected or silenced after the Restoration in 1660*. He will find that in the Church of England there was no lack of men imbued with the right spirit, men who so believed and preached the word that they saved both themselves and those who heard them. We have no hesitation in saying that if the spiritual party in the Church of England had triumphed in the seventeenth century, the revival of religion in the eighteenth century would have been anticipated.

It is a melancholy fact that the men who decided the fate of Presbyterianism were not the evangelists but the politicians of the Presbyterian party. It is not necessary to enter into details; it is enough to say that, in 1654, the victory of the political Presbyterians seemed to be complete. The Parliament of that year recognized Presbyterianism as the form by which the State Church was to be thenceforth governed.

When Presbyterianism became allied with the State it was brought under the influences which are detrimental to the spiritual mission of the Church. In Walker's *Sufferings of the Clergy* there may be

exaggerations and gross errors, but any man who has a knowledge of human nature will be inclined to think that some of the statements concerning the persecutions of Episcopalians by Presbyterians are true. As a matter of fact, no Church is fit to be trusted with the weapons of the civil power, no Church can wield them without loss of character. But that is not all. When a Church becomes dominant in a State, and avails itself of political power to push its own interests, it cannot resist the temptation to intrigue. Unbridled lust of managing is one of the vices of human nature. When it takes possession of the rulers of a Church, the secularizing of that Church is only a question of time.

An illustration of nemesis is afforded by the history of Presbyterianism. The political intrigues of the Presbyterians brought about the Restoration of Charles II. They little knew what they were doing. There are some men who yearn to handle 'grand affairs,' and we have no doubt that, unconscious of their coming doom, the Presbyterian leaders revelled in the conspiracies and secret correspondence that led to the restoration of the King. But they soon found out their mistake; and then they lifted up their hands in horror when they saw the catastrophe which had overtaken them.

The 'Act of Uniformity' deprived the Church of England of two thousand of its clergy, and did a work which we still contemplate with sorrow. We have

## 118 The Revival of Religion in England

nothing but admiration for the men who quitted their livings at the call of conscience; but we are afraid that all who ought to have marched out did not do so. The Act got rid of some of the best clergy from the Church; but it kept in it a crowd of men with low aims, and easily conformable consciences. The triumphant Episcopalians had no need to congratulate themselves on some of those who were retained. They were a source of weakness to the Church to which they clung, a hindrance to the work of the State Church as a spiritual organization.

In following the fortunes of the men who left the State Church in 1662, we travel a pathway that is dark with shadows. In process of time the country was dotted with Presbyterian churches, which retained for some years the best traditions of the Puritans. But decay set in. Having lost their supremacy in politics, we should have thought that the Presbyterians would have turned their attention to the evangelization of the neighbourhoods in which they settled. Some of them did. They preached the gospel; they cared for their congregations, leading them into a knowledge of the great doctrines which nourish and perfect Christian character. But, in a succeeding generation, the evangelistic spirit drooped; the evangelical doctrines disappeared from the pulpits, and the Presbyterian churches scarcely counted among the forces that fought against the influences that were spoiling the religious life of the nation.

When political weapons are taken out of the hands of a Church, there are others which it is tempted to grasp. It has often been remarked that, when a nation is compelled by arbitrary rulers to abstain from political discussion, it plunges into theological controversy. We cannot accept this as a rule that acts invariably; but it is certain that, in the case of the English Presbyterians, doctrinal discussion soon occupied the attention of ministers and congregations to the exclusion of the preaching of the gospel. It was unfortunate that the topic of investigation and debate was the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. If it had been a merely speculative subject, or a doctrine of minor importance, the evil effects would have been unimportant and transitory. But the fact of the Divinity of our Lord lies at the basis of Christian belief. If it is disputed by men who seem only anxious to display their intellectual aloofness and expertness, the faith and work of the Church are endangered. When such men, from their privileged place in the Christian pulpit, assail the doctrine, they create uneasiness in the minds of their audience, and they prepare the way for the abandonment of the evangelistic mission of their Church. It cannot be too clearly understood that a firm belief in the Divinity of Christ is the central force of evangelism. It is only so long as we are convinced that He is God that we have sufficient strength and hope to attack the sins and miseries of the world.

We have seen that the taint of Arianism existed



## 120 The Revival of Religion in England

in the State Church. Contemporary opinion leads us to the conclusion that it was widespread. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the plague declared itself among the Dissenters. Skeats, in his *History of the Free Churches*, tells us that it is probable that the General Baptists had never been entirely free from it. The assurance that 'neither the Particular Baptists nor the Congregationalists evinced any tendency towards anti-Trinitarian opinions' is cheering. But the same cannot be said of the Presbyterians. They 'shared equally with, if not to a greater extent than, the General Baptists, the characteristic tendency of theological thought.'<sup>1</sup>

We are now more particularly concerned with the progress of Unitarianism among the Presbyterians. For a considerable time the trend of thought concerning the Divinity of Christ was scarcely observed in the Dissenting Churches; but, in 1718, events occurred in the city of Exeter which brought the mischief to light. In that city there were four Presbyterian churches. The minister of one of them, James Peirce, held anti-Trinitarian views, but he did not think it necessary to publish them in his preaching. In a private conversation with a minister he revealed his convictions, and Exeter soon rang with the information of his heterodoxy. His case came before the local committee that was charged with the management of the four Churches, and also before a conference of the Western ministers.

<sup>1</sup> pp. 239, 240 (Miall's ed.)

From this time [says Skeats] scarcely any question was debated throughout the West of England but that of the Trinity. It was discussed in families, preached about from pulpits, written about in pamphlets, and the local journals teemed with intelligence of what was being said and done.

The West of England was aflame with excitement, and it was determined that the whole matter should be laid before the London Dissenting ministers.

On February 19, 1719, a meeting was held in Salters' Hall, London, which was attended by more than one hundred and fifty ministers. After considering the subject it seemed to be the general opinion that a letter of advice should be drawn up and forwarded to Exeter. At this point a proposition was made by Thomas Bradbury, with the unanimous consent of the Congregational ministers, that every one then present should, as a witness to his own faith, subscribe the First Article of the Established Church on the doctrine of the Trinity, and the answers to the fifth and sixth questions in the Catechism of the Westminster Assembly. The proposition was rejected by seventy-three to sixty-nine votes. After this vote the minority left the meeting and constituted themselves into a distinct assembly. The ministers who had opposed subscription were, in the main, Presbyterians, but among them were a few Congregationalists and Baptists. The 'subscribing' company 'included nearly all the Congregational ministers of the metropolis,

## 122 The Revival of Religion in England

and a majority of the Nonconformist pastors actually exercising the pastoral office.' The two assemblies forwarded separate addresses to Exeter, each address containing 'Advices for Peace.'<sup>1</sup>

It unfortunately happened that the letters of advice were delivered just too late to be of any service. The Exeter trustees had taken the matter into their own hands, and had locked Peirce out of his chapel. This act caused great resentment. Peirce's friends, to the number of three hundred, built him a new place of worship.

From this time [says Skeats] Unitarianism spread with unexampled rapidity. It was unfortunate for the orthodox party that their cause, both in London and in the West, had become identified with an act of personal injustice, and something like synodical tyranny. It is impossible, however, to throw the whole blame of this transaction on one party. The trustees contrived to make the doctrine of Unitarianism popular, and they lived to see nearly every Nonconformist church in Exeter, and some of the principal churches in Devonshire and Somersetshire, lapse from the orthodox standard. The Presbyterian churches of London, Lancashire, and Cheshire became similarly infected. In less than half a century the doctrines of the great founders of Presbyterianism could scarcely be heard from any Presbyterian pulpit in England. The denomination vanished as suddenly as it had arisen; and, excepting in literature, has left little visible trace of the greatness of its power.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Skeats's *History of the Free Churches*, pp. 241-246 (Miall's Ed.).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

It is impossible to watch the collapse and disappearance of Evangelical Presbyterianism in England without profound sorrow. But the sketch of its history which we have given explains its ineffectiveness, and also casts some light upon the reasons for the failure of the Dissenting Churches as evangelizing forces.

Those who weigh the evidence we have adduced concerning the ministers of the Established and the Dissenting Churches will have no difficulty in accounting for the fact that during the eighteenth century the great mass of Englishmen was unmoved by the power of Christianity. The evangelist was scarcely represented in the ranks of the ministry. The controversialist was conspicuous ; but, side by side with him, was the politician, the pluralist, the seeker for preferment, the indolent shepherd of the flock, the man of low morals and disgraceful life. Was it any wonder that in such an age, to use Skeats's words, 'Nothing that required great exertion or great sacrifice was either attempted or done.'<sup>1</sup> Such ministers were impotent in the presence of the ignorance and the corruption that surrounded the Churches. They had no power to rouse the nation that slumbered in the valley of the shadow of death.

<sup>1</sup> Skeats's *History of the Free Churches*, p. 251.



## V

## The Religious Societies

GENERAL descriptions of the religious condition of a country are rarely absolutely correct. They often fail to include modifying facts which, when weighed, alter our estimate, and lend a little brightness to pictures of spiritual desolation. In dealing with a revival of religion, it must be remembered that although it is not produced by, still it arises out of, existing conditions, and that some are favourable. The law of development acts in the religious world. When studying the new creation of a people, it is essential that we should search diligently for the beginnings of the new life that has manifested itself with such abruptness.

The description we have given of the condition of religion in England in the eighteenth century is founded on unimpeachable testimony. It is certain that the country suffered from a paralysis of faith. As a consequence, those fine qualities of tone and temper, character and conduct, which depend upon faith for their life, languished. Not only so. As the restraining

power of faith no longer influenced those whose morality is, in great part, the result of a belief of facts which they dare not disbelieve, the ordinary virtues were enfeebled. In point of spirituality and morality it would be difficult to find a more discouraging generation than that which existed in these islands when the evangelists of the new era began their work. To a man who searches religious problems only with his intellect, the state of the country at the beginning of the eighteenth century seems beyond remedy. But he who knows something of the wonderful ways of the Spirit of God is saved from despair. He stands in the valley of dry bones; he admits that they are 'very dry'; but, in the great silence, he waits for the whispers of the wind that can make a dead nation live.

Turning towards the preceding century, we hear the faint sounds of the beneficent storm which vitalized the heavy atmosphere. Let us take one illustration of the manner in which the Spirit of God prepared the way for the great revival of religion. About the year 1678, in the dreary days of Charles II, Dr. Andrew Horneck, a German by birth, was the preacher at the Savoy. He attracted large audiences by his 'awakening sermons.' At St. Michael's, Cornhill, Mr. Smithies was the morning lecturer. He was of a kindred spirit, and his sermons brought many under conviction of sin. Amongst the hearers of Horneck and Smithies were several young men who belonged to 'the middle station of life.' Woodward, in his *Account of the Rise*

## 126 The Revival of Religion in England

*and Progress of the Religious Societies*, gives a description of the experiences of these young men. He says that they belonged to the Church of England, in the cities of London and Westminster; and that, about the same time, they were

touched with a very affecting sense of their sins, and began to apply themselves, in a very serious manner, to religious thoughts and purposes.<sup>1</sup>

He tells us that one of them revealed to him his spiritual sorrows. With floods of tears he lamented

that he had not till then had any affecting apprehensions of the glorious majesty and perfections of Almighty God, nor of His infinite love to men, in His Son Jesus Christ; and that he had not before felt any just convictions of the immense evil of every offence against God, though it be but, said he, in the wilful neglect or misperformance of any duty to Him. But now he saw, and groaned under all this, in very sharp and pungent convictions. And withal, perceiving the universal corruption of human nature, and the deplorable crookedness and deceit of man's heart, and with what a world of temptations we are encompassed, being withal besieged by many invisible legions of infernal spirits; when he considered all this, his soul was even poured out within him, and he was in danger of being overwhelmed with excessive sorrow. The case was very much the same with several young men at the same time, as he then told me, some of whom had been greatly tempted by the devil, that murderer from the beginning, to lay violent hands on themselves, which was also, he confessed, his own temptation; and that so urgent,

<sup>1</sup> p. 19.

sometimes, that sleep departed from his eyes, as well as rest from his soul.<sup>1</sup>

These young men often resorted to their ministers for spiritual advice. Woodward says—

There needed little other language but that of their looks to discover their inward sorrows to each other ; they needed no other arguments to incline them to pity each other's case, but to consider their own, there being a propensity in nature to succour those who groan under the like miseries with ourselves. So that by these and the like means, they soon contracted a very intimate acquaintance.<sup>2</sup>

The ministers whom they consulted advised

that since their troubles arose from the same spiritual cause, and that their inclinations and resolutions centred in the same purpose of a holy life, they should meet together once a week, and apply themselves to good discourse and things wherein they might edify one another. And for the better regulation of their meetings, several rules and orders were prescribed them, being such as seemed most proper to effect the end proposed. Upon this they met together, and kept to their rules, and at every meeting they considered the wants of the poor, which, in process of time, amounted to such considerable sums, that thereby many poor families were relieved, some poor people set into a way of trade suitable to their capacities, sundry prisoners set at liberty, some poor scholars furthered in their subsistence at the university, several orphans maintained, with many other good works.<sup>3</sup>

These young men soon found the benefit of their conferences one with another, by which, as some of them

<sup>1</sup> pp. 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> p. 22.



## 128 The Revival of Religion in England

have told me with joy, they better discovered their own corruptions, the devil's temptations, and how to countermine his subtle devices ; as to which each person communicated his experiences to the rest.<sup>1</sup>

For the better management of their 'common stock,' these young men chose two stewards, who managed the charities of the society. Woodward possessed a list of these stewards. From it we learn that the first were chosen in 1678. The list extends to the beginning of the reign of James II.

The reign of Charles II was a most unpropitious time for the founding of a spiritual society. The reaction against the stern rule of the Puritans displayed itself in the sphere of morals. It would be difficult to point to any period in English history in which godliness had to fight so hard for its life as in the years succeeding the restoration of the dissolute king. At his death some slight sense of relief may have been experienced, but those who were able to discern the times were full of gloomy anticipations. James II was a Roman Catholic. A *roué* was succeeded by a bigot, and a bigot is the deadly foe of religion. Woodward, speaking of the beginning of the reign of James II, says—

In this unhappy juncture the face of the reformed religion began to be clouded, and all private meetings were suspected. And now, alas ! some of these persons, that is, the members of the Religious Societies, not having digged

<sup>1</sup> *Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies*, p. 23.

deep enough to have a firm root in religion, began to shrink and give back, like the seed in our Saviour's parable which had no deepness of earth. They were afraid of the jealousy of the State against them, especially when they saw the bloody and merciless executions in city and country with which that reign began, which dyed it of such a crimson colour as rendered it frightful to many, particularly to these young proselytes. Upon which some of them forsook their wonted assemblies, and getting loose from their strict rules and good society, they grew cool in religious concerns, and some of them grew vain and extravagant.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Religious Societies were numerically weakened by the secession of some of their members, these days of danger roused the spirit of the remnant, and they soon made their influence felt. When they saw the Mass celebrated daily in the Chapel Royal and elsewhere, they resolved to set up at their own expense daily prayers at eight in the evening at St. Clement Danes, which 'never wanted a full and affectionate congregation.' Not long after, they began an evening monthly lecture in the same church for the benefit of communicants. As lecturers they secured the services of the most eminent divines in London.

With the beginning of the reign of William and Mary, a change came over the fortunes of the Religious Societies. The spiritual work prospering, a private order was made at one of their assemblies that every member should endeavour to bring in one other at least into their Society. This was the means of a considerable

<sup>1</sup> p. 24.

## 130 The Revival of Religion in England

increase in numbers. These 'religious fraternities' grew and increased 'even until they became conspicuous, and in some degree famous: which still induced other young men, that were of sober inclinations, to join with them; and as they multiplied in distant parts of the city they erected new Societies by the pattern of the old.'<sup>1</sup>

This increase excited suspicion, and in order to remove it an 'apology' was addressed to the Bishop of London by the members of the Societies. In this 'apology' they said that

their only design was to quicken each other's affections towards spiritual things, and to advance their preparations for another world; and to this end, to assist each other to live in all respects as it becometh the gospel. And that they desired to prosecute this Christian design in none but Christian methods, with due respect to their superiors in Church and State, and without any cause of offence to any one.<sup>2</sup>

When they presented their 'apology,' the bishop dismissed them with the words: 'God forbid that I should be against such excellent designs.'<sup>3</sup>

It must be noted that these Societies were in close connexion with the Established Church. The members went to the monthly communion, they constantly used portions of the Book of Common Prayer in their assemblies; they set up public prayers in many

<sup>1</sup> *Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> p. 36.

churches in the City, and frequented them in great numbers. They deferred to their ministers, without whose approbation no rule, prayer, or practice was allowed among them. Dr. Woodward says—

It has scarce ever happened that any person who could be truly said to be of these Societies hath fallen from the public communion to any sect or separation.<sup>1</sup>

Frequent communion was practised by many of the members of the Societies, and sermons were preached in certain churches, preparatory to the administration of the sacrament.

At the time when Dr. Woodward wrote, there were forty Religious Societies 'in the compass of the Bills of Mortality.' But they were not confined to London. They were formed in Oxford and Cambridge, and in other cities and towns. There can be no doubt that they exercised very considerable influence upon the religious life of the country.

Our brief sketch of the Religious Societies, which we have taken from the pages of Dr. Woodward, proves that the Spirit of God had not forsaken England even during those dark years of which we have written. In inscrutable ways, in that night of despair He was shedding His gentle light into innumerable lives, and was preparing the nation for the visitation of 'a day-spring from on high.'

<sup>1</sup> pp. 37, 38.



## VI

## The Dawn of the Revival in Wales

OUR description of the social, moral, and religious condition of the English people during the eighteenth century gives us the right point of view from which to watch the work that was done in this country by John Wesley, and those who were associated with him in the toils and triumphs of the Great Revival. Their work was national. It is a mistake to suppose that it was done within the Established Church, or even in association with that Church. We note with satisfaction that, in the seventh volume of the new *History of the English Church*, a volume that deals with the period from the accession of George I to the end of the eighteenth century, the late Canon Overton and the Rev. Frederick Relton acknowledge that Wesley's work does not come within their province. They dismiss it with brief reference. In their introduction they say—

The reader will find little in these pages about the marvellous organization which Wesley either originated or adopted, not because it is a thing of naught, but simply

because it is not a part of the particular subject of this book. For the same reason Whitefield's efforts, under the patronage of Lady Huntingdon, are lightly passed over, because they had even less connexion with the Church of England than the Wesleyan Societies; Whitefield being far less of a Churchman than either of the brothers Wesley.<sup>1</sup>

In another place they say—

The Society of which John Wesley was the founder hardly comes within our scope. It is impossible not to come to the conclusion that from the very first the Wesleyan movement, so far as it concerned organization, never was and never could have been a Church movement. It is true that Wesley's commanding influence not only prevented any formal separation from the Church during his lifetime, but also secured the punctual attendance, at least for some time, at the public worship in the parish churches 'of all who regarded his opinion'; that is, in other words, of all Methodists, for with them his word was law. But all this seems beside the mark. The real question is, What was the tendency of the movement from the very beginning? Where did the followers of Wesley find their religion? Surely not in the Church system, but in their own separate organizations. It is purely a modern notion that the Wesleyan movement ever was—or ever was intended to be, except by Wesley—a Church movement.<sup>2</sup>

There can be no doubt that the authors of the seventh volume of *The History of the English Church* are right. They have reached the conclusion which was so clearly stated by Dr. Rigg in 1881, in a

<sup>1</sup> p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 74, 75.

## 134 The Revival of Religion in England

pamphlet entitled, *Is Modern Methodism Wesleyan Methodism?* He then said—

Many Methodists were themselves personally members of the Church of England—though a continually increasing number were not; but the Society, as such, was in no sense or degree any part or any dependency of that Church. It had no organic connexion with it whatever. The parish clergy, as a rule, had no authority in the Society, they stood in no relation with it. Some three or four parish clergymen, during fifty years, connected themselves with Mr. Wesley as his helpers, and put themselves under his orders. These were thus brought into connexion with his Societies. But otherwise, and as parish ministers, the clergy had no relation whatever to John Wesley's Societies. Nor had the bishops, nor any bishop, any authority over the Society, or in the Conference, or, so far as regarded his Methodist work, and his relation to his Societies, over John Wesley. Methodism, therefore, as an organization, was altogether outside the Church of England during Wesley's own lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

It is well that the 'purely modern notion,' so frankly abandoned by Canon Overton and Mr. Relton, should disappear. It tends to obscure the real character of Wesley's work. The direct influence of that work on the Church was slight. Wesley's sphere was the nation. Like his Master, moved with compassion he went out to the multitude. He spent his life in seeking and saving the people of England.

We intend to fix our attention, more especially, upon the revival of religion in England, but our

<sup>1</sup> p. 6.

understanding of that event will be clearer if we turn aside for a while to consider certain facts which are closely connected with Wesley's work in this country. The sunrise which came upon the nation after Wesley's conversion was preceded by a beautiful dawn in America and Wales. So early as 1730-1732, a remarkable revival occurred in the Presbyterian church at Freehold, New Jersey, under the ministry of the Rev. John Tennent. In 1734 Jonathan Edwards preached with remarkable success in Northampton, New England. The Spirit of God stirred the hearts of men into an eager desire for salvation, and led them into the new life that comes through faith in Christ. But we wish, more especially, to turn our eyes towards Wales. Among its hills it is easy to see the lights of dawn which heralded the morning of the Great Revival.

Griffith Jones has been called the 'Morning Star of the Methodist Revival.' In his parish of Llanddowror, in Carmarthenshire, he preached the gospel with success nearly twenty years before Wesley's conversion. There is no more interesting figure in modern Welsh church history than that of Griffith Jones. He was a man who acted on his own convictions, and who dared to initiate and accomplish original work. He was not an evangelist merely. He had the sagacity to see that the battle he had to fight was not only against sin, but also against ignorance. He was the founder of the famous 'Circulating Schools,' in which, in the course of twenty-four years, upwards of one hundred



## 136 The Revival of Religion in England

and fifty thousand men, women, and children, between the ages of six years and seventy, were taught to read the Bible in the Welsh language. In these schools the minds of the people were prepared for the appeals that were subsequently made to them by the evangelists who passed from village to village like flames of fire.

Many of the scenes of the Great Revival are made beautiful by the presence of Griffith Jones. We think, however, that one of the most significant incidents in his life is connected with the little church of Llanddewi Brefi. He was accustomed to make excursions into different parts of Wales, in order that he might preach, in behalf of his schools, in churches where the clergy were in sympathy with his work. On one of his journeys he came to Llanddewi Brefi, a village that stands about five miles from Llangeitho in the county of Cardigan. When he commenced his sermon he noticed a young clergyman in the crowd, and was struck with the scornful look with which he was watching the proceedings. He paused, and darted a prayer to heaven that the service might result in the conversion of the supercilious hearer, and that, being converted, he might be the instrument of saving many souls. That prayer was answered. The young clergyman was Daniel Rowlands, of Llangeitho, a little village that lies in a narrow valley surrounded by wild mountains. Daniel Rowlands was the curate of his brother, John Rowlands. He had been permitted to take orders one year before the usual age 'in consideration of his

superior scholarship.' He was a fine athlete. It had been his custom to spend Sunday afternoon with the young men of the parish in sport, and his skill and enthusiasm gained him great popularity. But he was restless in mind and dissatisfied. There was an Independent preacher in the neighbourhood named Philip Pugh, who is described as one of the very few Dissenting ministers then in Wales who were able to gather together a considerable congregation. Daniel Rowlands was attracted to him, and he determined to discover the secret of his success. Listening to his preaching, he thought that the secret of his power was that he 'thundered.' He resolved to try the same method. He chose the most terrible texts. He spoke of the sinner's miserable condition, of judgement, and everlasting torments, with such eloquence and force that the church soon became crowded with attentive and awe-struck listeners. It is estimated that more than a hundred members of his congregation were under deep impressions before the preacher himself began to think seriously at all. At this point in his career he heard Griffith Jones preach in the church of Llanddewi Brefi. He returned to Llangeitho a 'new creature.' His fame spread abroad, and he was asked to preach in many places. He still 'thundered.' Multitudes trembled in his presence, and the churches sometimes rang with the shouts and shrieks of affrighted people. Mr. Pugh, deeply interested in his work, spoke to him, and advised him to preach the gospel, and to show his

## 138 The Revival of Religion in England

congregations their need of faith in the crucified Redeemer. 'I fear,' said Rowlands, 'that I do not really possess that faith myself.' 'Preach it,' was the reply; 'preach it until you feel it. It will come without fail. If you go on preaching the law after this fashion you will kill half the population, for you thunder those awful curses in such a terrible manner that it is impossible for any man to stand before you.' Mr. Pugh's advice was taken, and Rowlands began to preach the gospel with singular sweetness and success. The effect upon his audiences was remarkable.

As he proclaimed free forgiveness through the sufferings and death of the Saviour of the world, sinners ready to perish felt that there was hope even for them. In realizing that hope, they rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and great numbers expressed their ecstatic joy in shouts of praise.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of the wailings of despair the churches were filled with the hallelujahs of people who emerged from darkness and walked in the glory that shone from the face of the Lord. The church of Llangeitho became the scene of wonderful events. On one Sunday morning Rowlands was preaching, and the people were listening with intense eagerness. Unconscious of the flight of time, he preached on and on until a ray of light came through the western window, and revealed the fact that the sun was setting. We can imagine the worshippers wending their way homewards in the

<sup>1</sup> Williams's *Welsh Calvinistic Methodism*, p. 20.

lovely evening light that lies upon the hills and floods the valleys at the close of day.

Griffith Jones and Daniel Rowlands were clergymen. They fought a good fight for the gospel, and rendered invaluable evangelistic service in Wales. But we must turn from them to another part of the Principality if we are to catch sight of a man who also stands conspicuous in the dawn-light of the Great Revival. On March 30, 1735, in Talgarth Church, in the county of Brecon, the parish minister preached a sermon in which he urged upon his people the necessity of receiving the sacrament, and in which he used arguments removing objections against attendance at the Lord's Supper. Listening to him was a young man about twenty-one years of age, who was a schoolmaster in the neighbourhood. His name was Howell Harris. He felt the force of the preacher's appeal, and determined to be present at the sacrament on the next Sunday, which was Easter Day. When the time arrived, he went to the church, intending to approach the Lord's table. While repeating the confession in which the communicants declare that the remembrance of their sins is 'grievous' to them, and that their burden is 'intolerable,' his mind awoke to the significance of the words he was using. Reflecting for a moment, he found that he had no such sense of sin, and that the words to him were meaningless. He felt inclined to rise and leave the church, but better thoughts prevailed, and he remained and received



## 140 The Revival of Religion in England

the sacrament. The light which had fallen upon him on Easter Day followed him. In private he read and prayed until, at last, he saw the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The words that he had uttered in Talgarth Church became instinct with terrible suggestions. On Whit Sunday, May 25, 1735, the sacrament was again administered at Talgarth, and, once more, Howell Harris was present. In one of the books he had read, this sentence occurred: 'If we would go to the sacrament simply believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, we should receive forgiveness of all our sins.' These words haunted him, and he was determined to test their truth. In the quiet church, in the presence of the emblems of the Saviour's sacrificial death, there shone out before him a vision of the crucified Christ. His own words concerning the experience that came to him, through faith, in that solemn moment, are—

I was convinced by the Holy Ghost that Christ died for me, and that all my sins were laid on Him. I was now acquitted at the bar of justice, and in my conscience. This evidenced itself to be true faith by the peace, joy, watchfulness, hatred to sin, and fear of offending God that followed it.<sup>1</sup>

The Whitsuntide experience in Talgarth Church made Howell Harris an evangelist. He tells us that when he saw Christ on the cross at the sacrament he 'felt some insatiable desires after the salvation of poor

<sup>1</sup> *A Brief Account of the Life of Howell Harris*, extracted from papers written by himself, pp. 13, 14.

sinners,' and that his heart longed 'for their being convinced of their sins and misery.' He soon began his work. On his way home he told some of his neighbours that he knew his sins were forgiven. They might well stare at him and wonder at his words. He, himself, 'had never heard any one make that confession before,' or say that it was possible for a man to know that his sins were pardoned. His confession amazed the sober, orthodox communicants of Talgarth; but he was so firmly convinced of the forgiveness of his sins that nothing could shake his assurance.

Howell Harris had now entered on strange experiences. He was a traveller in a lonely land, and he fared onward without the comfort and guidance of a human companion. But in the days that prelude great revivals of religion the doctrines suggested by Whitsuntide receive beautiful illustrations. On June 18, 1735, an experience came to Howell Harris which, to us, is still full of significance. In some quiet place he was kneeling in secret prayer, when suddenly his heart was filled 'with the fire of the love of God.' There sprang to his lips words with which, previously, he was 'totally unacquainted.' They may have caught his eye as he turned over the leaves of his Bible, but they had made no distinct impression on his memory. When the 'fire of the love of God' fell upon him he cried, 'Abba, Father! Abba, Father!' 'I could not help calling God my Father,' he says, with touching simplicity. 'I knew that I was His child, and that

## 142 The Revival of Religion in England

He loved me and heard me.' The cry that rose from the secret place of prayer became a watchword in the days of the Great Revival.

Howell Harris's experiences in the neighbourhood in which he lived were unique. He had no one to help him, no mature Christian to lead him and comfort him in the midst of the temptations that soon pitilessly assailed him. But he walked with God, guided through all perplexities by the light of a simple faith. His own words, descriptive of his experiences at this period, are golden: 'I was all this while a total stranger to all the controversies about religion. I only knew this, that God loved me, and would love me, for His own Name's sake, freely to the end. This made me love Him again, and study how to show my love to Him.'

It was no wonder that Howell Harris became an evangelist. He had realized, in Talgarth Church, the forgiveness of his sins, and his heart was filled with 'the fire of the love of God.' At first he was tempted to hide himself from his friends, and brood over his new experiences in secret. But the love of God burned in him, and constrained him to lead others into a consciousness of personal salvation. He was stirred by the religious condition of the neighbourhood. On the Lord's Day, no sooner was the service in the church over than sport and revelry began. With the exception of some of the Dissenters, family prayers were utterly laid aside. 'A universal deluge of swearing,

lying, reviling, drunkenness, fighting, and gaming had overspread the country.' So far as he could see, no one took any notice of the prevailing wickedness, or made any effort to stop it. He was a layman, and naturally turned to the ministers as the men who had most power to stop the evils of the day. But his appeals to them were in vain. Then he could be silent no longer. He began to speak to his neighbours. Gradually an impression was made. He gathered together a few of his friends whose hearts had been touched with 'some sense of their danger.' Soon the people flocked around him. The inevitable result followed—he began to preach in an informal way.

In November, 1735, Howell Harris went to Oxford, and spent one term at St. Mary's Hall. But he grew weary of the 'irregularities and immoralities' of the University, and returned to Wales. He began to visit systematically from house to house, not only in his native parish, but also in the parishes adjoining. The people crowded to the houses in which he and his associates met. A remarkable change showed itself in the moral and religious condition of the neighbourhood. Family worship was set up in many houses, the churches were crowded, and the number of the communicants at the sacrament was greatly increased. The success of Howell Harris's work attracted the attention of the magistrates and the clergy. Instead of encouraging the man who was toiling for the uplifting of the people, the magistrates threatened him and



## 144 The Revival of Religion in England

those who received him into their houses with punishment, and the clergy were furious with him for daring to preach. Their hostility checked the progress of the work. But, in secret, Howell Harris met those who had been religiously impressed; and then, when the springtime came, he resumed his work of house-to-house visitation. In his visits he became acquainted with several Dissenters; they opened their houses to him, and he availed himself of the opportunity to make known the gospel.

In 1736 Howell Harris set up a school at Trevecca; and, in the same year, he founded several Religious Societies like those which are described in Dr. Woodward's book. Being turned out of his school in 1737, he devoted himself to the work of itinerant preaching, going from town to town, braving the violence of the mob. He had great power as a preacher. He had a fine presence and a commanding voice. He was specially successful in dealing with the conscience and in bringing his hearers to a knowledge of their sins. At first his preaching was confined to private houses, but eventually he was driven to preach in the fields and streets. At the beginning of March, 1739, he met George Whitefield at Cardiff, who gives the following description of him and his work. Writing of Howell Harris and Wales, Whitefield says—

A burning and shining light has he been in those parts; a barrier against profaneness and immorality, and an indefatigable promoter of the true gospel of Jesus

Christ. About three or four years God has inclined him to go about doing good. He is now above twenty-five years of age. Twice he has applied, being every way qualified, for holy orders, but was refused, under a false pretence, that he was not of age, though he was then twenty-two years and six months. About a month ago he offered himself again, but was put off. Upon this he was, and is, still resolved to go on in his work ; and indefatigable zeal has he shown in his Master's service. For these three years, as he told me from his own mouth, he has discoursed almost twice every day for three or four hours together ; not authoritatively as a minister, but as a private person, exhorting his Christian brethren. He has been, I think, in seven counties, and has made it his business to go to wakes, &c., to turn people from such lying vanities. Many ale-house people, fiddlers, harpers, &c., Demetrius-like, sadly cry out against him for spoiling their business. He has been made the subject of numbers of sermons, has been threatened with public prosecutions, and had constables sent to apprehend him. But God has blessed him with inflexible courage—instantaneous strength has been communicated to him from above ; and he still continues to go from conquering to conquer. He is of a most catholic spirit, loves all that love our Lord Jesus Christ, and, therefore, he is styled by bigots a Dissenter. He is contemned by all that are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God ; but God has greatly blessed his pious endeavours. Many call, and own him as their spiritual father ; and, I believe, would lay down their lives for his sake. He discourses generally in a field, from a wall, a table, or anything else, but at other times in a house. He has established near thirty Societies in South Wales, and still his sphere of action is enlarged daily. He is full of faith and the Holy Ghost. . . . Blessed be God, there seems to be a noble spirit gone out into Wales ; and I believe ere long there will be more

## 146 The Revival of Religion in England

visible fruits of it. What inclines me strongly to think so is, that the partition-wall of bigotry and party-zeal is broken down, and ministers and teachers of different communions join with one heart and one mind to carry on the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Lord make all the Christian world thus-minded ! For till this is done I fear we must despair of any great reformation in the Church of God.' <sup>1</sup>

When Howell Harris commenced to preach in the open air, he soon found himself in the presence of the turbulent mob. But he was a fearless man, and risked his life without hesitation in the cause of his Master. Lecky tells us that he made it his special mission to inveigh against public amusements, and he describes an incident which occurred at Monmouth when Harris, during the races, took his stand on a table outside the room in the town-hall, where many county people were dining under the presidency of a duke, and 'poured out a fierce denunciation of the sinfulness of his auditors.' <sup>2</sup> On another occasion we catch sight of him, in February, 1739, at Mac-hynlleth, placed in an open window, trying to preach to the crowd that surged and roared in the street. But he was obliged to desist. The shouting, threatening, and swearing of the mob drowned his voice, and stones were flung at him. An attorney came to him with 'rage and fury in his looks, and his mouth full of the language of hell.' With him was a 'gentleman,' and also a clergyman, 'possessed of the same spirit and

<sup>1</sup> *Brief Account of the Life of Howell Harris*, pp. 30-32.

<sup>2</sup> *History of England*, vol. ii. pp. 604, 605.

using the same language.' These three headed the mob. A pistol was discharged at him, but he received no hurt. Finding that it was useless to attempt to preach, he left the house and went into the midst of the crowd, 'not expecting to escape alive.' But his hour was not come. The mob assaulted him, but did not kill him. At last, one of his friends fetched a horse, and he mounted and rode through the street. Sticks and stones were thrown at him, but the shield of the Lord was over him, and he escaped. Lecky says that the people and clergy were furious against him. On one occasion a companion was killed by the mob. On another, he was beaten almost to death; again and again he was stoned with such fury that his escape appeared all but miraculous.

He was repeatedly denounced from the pulpit. One clergyman was seen distributing intoxicating liquors among the mob, in order to excite them. Another, who held no less a position than that of chancellor of the diocese of Bangor, stirred up whole districts against him.<sup>1</sup>

But his work was successful. He preached to immense crowds, founded many Religious Societies, and drove back the flood of godlessness that threatened to overwhelm the country. His name still shines with special radiance in the annals of the religious life of Wales.

We can only mention one other Welsh preacher

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, vol. ii. p. 605.



## 148 The Revival of Religion in England

who was a herald of the Great Revival. His name was Howell Davies. Griffith Jones, in addition to his parish work as a clergyman, kept a school, and Howell Davies was one of his pupils. Through the ministry of his tutor, Davies was converted. He determined to become a clergyman, and was ordained to the curacy of Llysyfran in Pembrokeshire. His preaching produced a great impression; crowds came to hear him, and many received spiritual blessing. But there were some of the influential parishioners who resented his plain dealing, and, through their means, he was dismissed from Llysyfran. Being set free from a settled cure he accepted invitations to preach in other parts of the county. Remarkable scenes were witnessed when he administered the Lord's Supper in the little Welsh churches of Pembrokeshire. They could not contain the communicants who flocked to the table of the Lord. On some occasions crowds stood outside waiting their turn, and the church had to be filled twice or thrice before all had received the sacrament. Howell Davies seems to have done his principal work in Pembrokeshire. His influence in the county was great, and the effect of his preaching was shown in the changed lives of many people.

When we review the work of Griffith Jones, Daniel Rowlands, Howell Harris, and Howell Davies, we see in it the characteristics of the great religious and moral movement that subsequently changed the condition of England. Their experiences, sufferings, and successes

present us with a miniature of the Great Revival. One point, especially, is clear. These men felt the burden of sin, they knew that, through faith in Christ, that burden could be removed, and their experience of forgiveness made them evangelists. No one can follow Howell Harris, for instance, as he takes his solitary journey to the Cross, and from the Cross to the revelation of his sonship, without discerning the secret of the inspiration that afterwards drove him into the midst of the masses of his wild and dissolute countrymen. His life interprets the meaning of the 'New Covenant.' The forgiveness of sins was followed by the writing of the law in his heart. The knowledge of the Lord came to him, not by human instruction, but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. And, because he saw that his joyous experience could be shared by every one who would come to Christ and believe in Him as he had done, he counted not his life dear to him so that, by his ministry, from the least to the greatest, the people of Wales might be saved.

## VII

## The Dawn of the Revival in England

WE have watched the springing of the day amongst the hills of Wales, and must now turn to England to detect the touch of the dawn on the darkness which enshrouded this country in the first half of the eighteenth century.

It is often affirmed that the Great Revival had its beginning in Oxford. It is undoubtedly true that some of the most prominent workers in the revival were members of the University; but the more closely we scrutinize their religious experience, the more are we impressed with the fact that, with scarcely an exception, while in the University, they lacked the force that makes a man an evangelist and fits him for the task of affecting and changing the moral and religious condition of a nation. The cleansing fire did not fall on John and Charles Wesley at Oxford. It came amidst other surroundings; and it was only after that baptism that they went out with the message of salvation to the people of England.

We must, however, make one exception. The

knowledge of the forgiveness of sins came to George Whitefield at the University. It is interesting to read the account of his experiences, and to watch the working of his mind on the problem which was soon to engage the anxious consideration of myriads of Englishmen. He sought passionately the entrance into the way of salvation, thought that he had found it, and tried to keep in the path by the practice of stern austerities, by observing the ordinances of the Church, and by busying himself in good works. But his heart was weighed down by the 'intolerable burden' of unpardoned sin. Then there came to him the revelation that flooded the mind of Howell Harris with sunshine. It is an interesting fact that the conversion of Howell Harris and of George Whitefield occurred nearly at the same time. Those who follow with reverence the work of the Spirit of God in the lives of men will picture to themselves the lonely Welshman, in the silence of the mountains, and Whitefield, in the stir and excitement of the University of Oxford, each receiving the priceless gift of conscious salvation. Howell Harris saw Christ as his Saviour on Whit Sunday, 1735; and 'about seven weeks after Easter' in the same year the great experience came to Whitefield. In the 1756 edition of his *Journal* he says—

After having undergone innumerable buffetings of Satan, and many months' inexpressible trials by night and day under the spirit of bondage, God was pleased at length to remove the heavy load, to enable me to lay hold on His



dear Son by a living faith, and, by giving me the spirit of adoption, to seal me, as I humbly hope, even to the day of everlasting redemption. But oh! with what joy—joy unspeakable—even joy that was full of and big with glory, was my soul filled, when the weight of sin went off, and an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God, and a full assurance of faith, broke in upon my disconsolate soul! . . . At first my joys were like a springtide, and, as it were, overflowed the banks. Go where I would, I could not avoid singing of psalms almost aloud; afterwards it became more settled, and, blessed be God, saving a few casual intervals, has abode and increased in my soul ever since.<sup>1</sup>

Whitefield left Pembroke College, Oxford, at the end of May, 1735, and did not return until March, 1736. In the interval the spirit of the evangelist stirred in him, and drove him out to work. His home was in Gloucester; and, by means of conversation, he was made instrumental in awakening several young people, whom he formed into a Society. He also visited other Societies, and diligently attended to sick persons and the poor. He went to the jail, and having gained the permission of the keeper and two ordinaries, he constantly read to and prayed with the prisoners each day for about three months.

While he was thus busy in his native city, the attention of Dr. Benson, the Bishop of Gloucester, was drawn to him by Lady Selwyn. An interview took place, which finally resulted in his being ordained in Gloucester Cathedral on Sunday, June 20, 1736. A

<sup>1</sup> p. 17.

week later he preached his first sermon in the Church of St. Mary de Crypt, the church in which he was baptized, and where he had received his first communion. When he faced the large congregation he felt a little awed. But his work in the prisons of Oxford and Gloucester stood him in good stead. There he had grown accustomed to teach and to exhort; and, as he proceeded with his sermon, his nervousness vanished, and he spoke out of a full heart his message to the people. His subject was 'The Necessity and Benefit of Religious Society,' and the sermon, probably, was the same which he afterwards preached before the Religious Societies in Bow Church, London. While commending the Societies, he took the opportunity to deliver an attack on the fashionable assemblies that wasted the time and dissipated the seriousness of those who frequented them. He took this line of set purpose. His eye had already discerned a mischief that was sapping the strength of the English people. Speaking to his audience, he said—

I warn you of the great danger those are in who, either by their subscriptions, presence, or approbation, promote societies of a quite opposite nature to religion. And here I would not be understood to mean only those public meetings which are designed manifestly for nothing else but revellings and banquetings, for chambering and wantonness, and at which a modest heathen would blush to be present, but also those seemingly innocent entertainments and meetings which the politer part of the world are so fond of, and spend so much time in; but which,

## 154 The Revival of Religion in England

notwithstanding, keep as many persons out of a sense of true religion as intemperance, debauchery, or any other crime whatever. Indeed, whilst we are in this world, we must have proper relaxations to fit us both for the business of our profession and religion. But then, for persons who call themselves Christians, that have solemnly vowed at their baptism to renounce the vanities of this sinful world, and that are commanded in Scripture to abstain 'from all appearance of evil' and to have their 'conversation in heaven'—for such persons as these to support meetings that, to say no worse of them, are vain and trifling, and have a natural tendency to draw off our minds from God, is absurd, ridiculous, and sinful.

This was a new note to sound in a pulpit of the Established Church; or, rather, it was a note that had been silent too long. As the audience listened to the young castigator of its foibles and follies, a few mocked, but most of those who were present felt the force of his appeal. Some one, however, went to the bishop, and complained that fifteen persons had been driven mad by the sermon. His lordship, after listening to the complaint, said that he hoped that the madness might not be forgotten before the next Sunday.

After preaching on 'The Necessity and Benefit of Religious Society,' Whitefield turned his attention to another subject. He tells us, in 1769, that the second sermon he ever made and ever preached was on the words, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.' In making the sermon he examined the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, and concluded that it was not

warranted by Scripture. In preaching, he expressed the views at which he had arrived, and by so doing roused strong opposition. Looking back upon the teaching of this sermon in other years, he stands firmly by the position he then assumed. He asserted, and continued to assert, that it was untrue that 'all people who were baptized were born again.' He says—

I would as soon believe the doctrine of transubstantiation. Can I believe that a person who, from the time of his baptism to the time, perhaps, of his death, never fights against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and never minds one word of what his god-fathers and god-mothers promised for him, is a real Christian? No, I can as soon believe that a little wafer in the hands of a priest is the very blood and bones of Jesus Christ.

Whitefield's conversion had explained to him the mystery of the 'new birth.' He saw that it was a spiritual change that comes upon a man whose sorrow for sin is accompanied by an act of direct faith in Christ as his Saviour. The revelation of Christ as a personal Saviour brings into the heart the love of God which is shed abroad there by the Holy Ghost. Through the influence of that divine love the great change is effected which makes a man 'a new creation.' Whitefield rejected the theory that this change could be wrought in a child by sprinkling a few drops of water on him, and so without any hesitation he declared his convictions. By so doing he



## 156 The Revival of Religion in England

manifested a high courage. The doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration was essential to the religious system of the Church of England. A vigilant orthodoxy guarded it with scrupulous care. Any teaching that moved the hour of a man's conversion from the moment of his baptism, disarranged a skilfully constructed scheme of doctrine and threw it into confusion. We do not wonder that Whitefield's attack was bitterly resented; but, notwithstanding fierce opposition, he refused to yield to his assailants. By his preaching he lifted into the light the most conspicuous doctrine of the Methodist Reformation, a doctrine without which that Reformation would have been impossible.

After his ordination Whitefield returned to the University, took his bachelor's degree, and then settled down to work in the prisons and in the charity schools which had been founded by the Methodists. But he did not remain long in Oxford. The Rev. Thomas Broughton, who afterwards was for many years the secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, was curate at the Tower of London. Being called into Hampshire for a time, Broughton wrote to Whitefield, and asked him to officiate in his place. On Wednesday, August 4, 1736, Whitefield went up to London. On that day, as there was no other passenger by the stage-coach, he employed much of his time in prayer. He got to London in the evening, and soon commenced his work. For two months, while supplying for Mr. Broughton, he preached in the chapel of the

Tower to crowded congregations. The members of the Religious Societies, being aware of his arrival, flocked to hear him as he discoursed 'about the new birth and the necessity of renouncing all in affection in order to follow Jesus Christ.' He also preached in several churches, and frequently visited the wretched inmates of the jails.

Returning to Oxford, Whitefield once more settled down. It was pleasant to get back to the University, and he would have gladly spent all his time there. But again he was called away. His friend, the Rev. Charles Kinchin, was the minister of Dummer, in Hampshire, and he needed a supply. The parish was small. Even so late as 1801 the population did not amount to three hundred persons. Whitefield says: 'His parish consisting chiefly of poor and illiterate people, my proud heart could not well brook it. I would have given all the world for one of my Oxford friends, and mourned for lack of them, as a dove that has lost its mate.' This mournful note is very genuine. It reminds us of the fact that three of the most prominent evangelists of the eighteenth century were men who had fallen under the spell of the fascination of Oxford. They would have remained there willingly, working among prisoners, teaching children, caring for the poor, preaching occasionally; and they would have allowed the world to beat out its life in darkness and despair.

At Dummer Whitefield came into refreshing contact with parish work. Mr. Kinchin had introduced the

## 158 The Revival of Religion in England

practice of having public prayers twice a day. He also catechized the children, and visited from house to house. Whitefield, adopting the same plan, found that he derived great profit from conversing with 'the poor country people.' He says: 'I frequently learnt as much by an afternoon's visit as in a week's study.' During his six weeks' residence in this Hampshire village, he received the offer of 'a very profitable curacy' in London. The offer must have made a strong appeal to him. He was poor and in debt; but, notwithstanding, he determined not to accept it. Oxford may have beckoned him from the distance; but, more probably, although he knew it not, a secret influence drew him towards his destined path. The refusal of 'a very profitable curacy,' in an age when the vision of 'preferment' dazzled the eyes of so many clergymen, administers a shock of surprise. It was an indication that a new spirit was abroad—a spirit which was conspicuously manifested during the years of the Great Revival.

While in Dummer another event occurred which exercised a determining influence on Whitefield's career. Charles Wesley, returning from Georgia, in America, landed in England on December 3, 1736. He wrote to Whitefield, saying that he had come back to procure workers for the mission in America. Charles Wesley's letter was followed by one from John Wesley. In it was an irresistible appeal. 'Do you ask me what you shall have?' wrote John Wesley, in his bright, eager

style. 'Food to eat, and raiment to put on; a house to lay your head in, such as your Lord had not; and a crown of glory that fadeth not away.' This letter made Whitefield's heart leap within him. In the quietude of his little parish he thought out the matter, and determined to become a missionary. He returned to Oxford, said farewell to his friends there, 'whom he loved as his own soul,' and made preparations to sail to Georgia without delay.

But work was waiting for Whitefield in this country which had to be done before he sailed to America. New Year's Day found him in Gloucester. He visited the city not only to say farewell to his friend there, but also to consult Bishop Benson concerning his determination to be a missionary. The bishop approved of his decision, and wished him much success. While staying with his relatives, he preached several times in the city, and he tells us that he had reason to believe that some were converted by his ministry. He had relations in Bristol, and after a three weeks' stay in Gloucester he went there to take leave of them. At that time Bristol was the second city in the kingdom, and its influence upon the country through its shipping was widespread. It was a fine strategic centre. A blow struck there for God would reverberate throughout the land. Indeed, it would be felt far beyond the shores of England, in those colonies with which the Bristol ships were accustomed to trade. Little thinking of the importance of the step he was taking, Whitefield



## 160 The Revival of Religion in England

went to Bristol, staying, we presume, with Mrs. Greville, his sister, the wife of a shopkeeper in Wine Street. On the Thursday after his arrival he went to hear a sermon in St. John's Church. The prayers having been read, while the psalm was being sung the minister came to his seat and asked him to preach. As he had some notes with him he consented. The people listened, and were impressed by the appeals he made. The next day there was a lecture at St. Stephen's. Once more he preached, and now the audience was startled and alarmed. On Sunday he preached again, and the city was stirred. The churches were crowded. Whitefield says—

The word, through the mighty power of God, was sharper than a two-edged sword. The doctrine of the new birth and justification by faith in Jesus Christ, though I was not so clear in it as afterwards, made its way like lightning into the hearers' consciences. The arrows of conviction stuck fast; and my whole time, between one lecture and another, except what was spent in necessary refreshment, was wholly occupied in talking with people under religious concern.

The whole city [he continues] seems to be alarmed. Churches are as full on week-days as they used to be on Sundays, and on Sundays are so full that many, very many, are obliged to go away because they cannot come in. Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, all come to hear the word preached.

The people of Bristol made a strong effort to retain Whitefield in their city, but his heart was set on his

missionary work, and, after a time, he left them, and journeyed to London. He hoped to find a ship that would carry him to America; but for about three weeks he waited for Oglethorpe, who expected to sail every day. Finding that he would not be able to set out on his voyage for some time, Whitefield came back to Gloucestershire, and retired to the rural seclusion of Stonehouse, where he supplied the place of the Rev. Sampson Harris. Here he found a Society in existence, and soon entered on congenial work. He writes in raptures about the beauty of the country, and the communion he had with God and his Christian companions during his walks in the woods. Crowds attended his preaching, and his constant theme was the New Birth. On Ascension Day, May 10, 1737, he preached on 'Whom He justified, them He also glorified,' and afterwards, when he said good-bye to the people, their sighs and tears almost broke his heart.

On May 23 Whitefield again visited Bristol. A mile outside the city he was met by a multitude of people on foot, and by many in coaches. When he entered Bristol he was saluted and blessed as he went along the street. During his stay he received letters from Oglethorpe stating that he would not embark for two months; and so, availing himself of his liberty, he gave himself up to the work of proclaiming the gospel. He preached about five times a week. The congregations swiftly increased. The people crowded the churches, hung on the rails of the organ-loft, and

## 162 The Revival of Religion in England

climbed on the leads of the roof. Often it was with great difficulty that he forced himself through the dense mass of hearers and made his way to the desk. Persons of all denominations, of all ranks, flocked to hear him. As a result of his work Religious Societies were formed, and the whole city was moved by his teaching concerning the doctrines of the forgiveness of sins, and the new birth that comes through the might of the Holy Ghost.

About the end of August Whitefield went up once more to London, where he was invited to preach in several churches. He came into close contact with the Religious Societies, and his preaching was accompanied by the effects which had been seen in Bristol. He preached generally nine times a week. On Sunday mornings, long before day, the streets were filled with people going to church. They carried lanterns in their hands, and as they picked their way along the narrow footpaths they could be heard conversing about the things of God. The personal popularity of Whitefield was remarkable. Walking through the streets, the people surged around him, and he had at last to go from place to place in a coach to avoid the admiring crowd. It was well that his popularity was tempered with opposition. At first, many of the clergy came to hear him; then some grew angry, and complained that the churches were so crowded that there was no room for the parishioners, and that the pews were spoiled. A report having been spread that the Bishop

of London intended to silence him, he waited on the bishop, and found that he had no such intention. Soon after this interview two clergymen sent for Whitefield, and told him that they would not let him preach in their pulpits any more unless he renounced that part of his sermon on Regeneration 'wherein he had expressed a wish that his brethren would entertain their auditories oftener with discourses upon the new birth.' As he promptly declined to comply with the request they became his steady opponents. In addition to the preaching of the obnoxious doctrine of the 'new birth,' Whitefield took a course, at this time, that excited the enmity of the clergy of the Church of England. Seeking for men who sympathized with his view of evangelical doctrine, he found some of them among Dissenters. They came to hear him, invited him to their houses, and received him into their social circle. He tells us that in his private conversations with them they repeatedly told him that if the doctrines of the new birth and of justification by faith were preached in the Church there would be few Dissenters in England. Whitefield saw no objection to such association with godly men; he thought it 'agreeable to the Word of God'; and so he continued his friendly relations with them. But some of the clergy did not share his views. They denounced him for consorting with the enemies of the Church, and they warned those over whom they had any influence to avoid him.



## 164 The Revival of Religion in England

In 1737 the influence of newspapers and magazines in England was slight when compared with the power which they now wield. But it was sufficient to form the ideas of a select circle of thinkers, who, in their turn, moulded public opinion. The news-letters that circulated in the coffee-houses and clubs of London, and found their way slowly into the country, often determined the fate of men. It is a tribute to Whitefield's popularity that he excited the interest of the purveyors of news in London, and was deemed a subject worthy of their pens. We can imagine the bewilderment of the newsmonger in the presence of the doctrines that Whitefield preached. The instinct which urges us to attack and destroy that which we cannot understand moved the literary men of the eighteenth century. They therefore assailed the young preacher and his teaching with the weapons of raillery and contempt, thinking that scorn would kill his reputation. Nerved by enthusiasm for the Church, of which some of them were neither pillars nor ornaments, they commenced a campaign of ridicule and calumny that lasted through many years. There can be no doubt that the biting paragraphs about Whitefield which occasionally appeared in the news-letters did much to create the adverse opinion which displayed itself at the outset and during the course of his evangelistic career.

On January 6, 1738, the ship on which Whitefield had embarked set sail from Gravesend. Before he

quitted the English coast he received another letter from John Wesley. In it he was strongly advised to abandon his mission to Georgia. His conviction that he was needed in America was only strengthened by this letter, and he put out into the deep, trusting in the providence of God.

We must now allow Whitefield to sink beneath the western sky-line for a time, and fix our attention on a man whose name is imperishably connected with the revival of the eighteenth century. The year 1738 is one of the most remarkable dates in the modern history of the Church of Christ. It is conspicuous because it was the year of John Wesley's conversion. His conversion marks the true beginning of that profound movement of religious thought which has changed the character of the English people.

It is not necessary to introduce biographical details into our description of John Wesley. We think, however, that if we could see him clearly, we should more quickly understand the secret of his success. There are only two portraits of Wesley that satisfy us. One was painted by Williams in 1742-3, and is now in Didsbury College; the other is the work of Romney, and a replica is in the possession of the Rev. G. Stringer Rowe. Williams's portrait of Wesley assists us when we try to picture the man who so deeply stirred this country in the eighteenth century. The Rev. Richard Green, in the *Proceedings of the*

## 166 The Revival of Religion in England

*Wesley Historical Society*,<sup>1</sup> has admirably described this portrait. He says—

This portrait by Williams is of great interest as representing Wesley in the vigour of his days. The face is of the Miltonic type. The nose is prominent and well defined ; from a little above the centre to the tip is almost a straight line, thus differentiating it from the distinctive Roman type. The eyes are large and reflective ; and over them the lids fall sufficiently to indicate calmness and rest, without drooping to drowsiness. There is no appearance of hurry or flutter in them ; but a hidden power of activity and sustained labour. They betoken a concentration of thought on the present moment ; there is no distant and dreamy absence of mind. They are fixed on the beholder with that calm, steady, penetrating gaze with which he arrested the leaders of riotous mobs, and put to silence disturbers and rude assailants in his meetings. The well-modelled mouth is firm, without sternness ; it indicates calmness, placidity, and self-control ; it shows no line of flippancy or anger, but an habitual seriousness that evidently could brighten into sweetness and joy, or could melt into tenderness, rather than harden itself into severity. Power of thought is shown in the widely spread eyebrows and the ample and slightly tapering forehead, partly hidden by the dark auburn hair, which, parted in the middle, falls in wavy ringlets upon the narrow, sloping shoulders. The square jaw and slightly projecting chin add strength and energy to the whole. The entire aspect is peaceful and at rest, grave without sadness, without agitation, or sign of fear or weakness ; calm and even majestic in its consciousness of strength, but free from foible and vanity ; it shows great reserve of power, and capability withal of quivering

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iv. p. 122.

emotion. It is the face of one having large sympathies, busied with great thoughts, moved by great purposes.

Mr. Green was happily inspired when he described John Wesley's face as 'of the Miltonic type.' Those who are connoisseurs of Wesley portraits are aware that some print-sellers occasionally make a mistake in the case of unnamed engravings. They have been known to advertise Milton's portrait as that of Wesley. No one can look at Williams's painting without seeing Wesley's Puritan ancestors looking out from the canvas. His face is worthy of the eulogium pronounced by Mr. Green. It is the face of one of the strongest, bravest, gentlest men in English history.

We have already suggested that, in dealing with the Evangelical Revival, we do not attach prime importance to the University life of John Wesley. Still, his Oxford days told upon his religious experience and character, and played their part in making him an evangelist.

The point of light in John Wesley's Oxford experiences is his connexion with what was called the 'Godly' or 'Holy Club.' Of that 'Club' he was the most conspicuous figure. Several descriptions of the 'Club' have been given, but that which seems to us the clearest and most reliable appeared under the title 'The Oxford Methodists: Being an account of some young Gentlemen in that City, in Derision so called, setting forth their rise and designs. With some Occasional Remarks on a Letter inserted in *Fog's*



## 168 The Revival of Religion in England

*Journal* of December 9, 1732, relating to them. In a letter from a Gentleman near Oxford to his friend at London.' Three editions of this pamphlet were published; the first in 1733, the second in 1737, and the third in 1738. The third edition, 'with very great alterations and improvements,' is that from which we take our sketch of the 'Godly Club.' The pamphlet was published anonymously, but it is now well known that its author was the saintly William Law, whose *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* produced so profound an impression on thousands of Englishmen. William Law is honoured by Christian men everywhere, and his testimony concerning the Oxford Methodists will be considered exceptionally valuable.

On December 9, 1732, *Fog's Journal* contained a letter severely criticizing a set of young men who, 'in derision,' were styled Methodists. A copy of the *Journal*, and a letter asking for information concerning the 'Methodists,' was sent to William Law by a friend. At that time William Law was entirely unacquainted with any of the members of the 'Club.' Instead of giving a hasty reply, he determined to make inquiries. He went on a visit to an intimate friend who belonged to Christ Church. His friend introduced him to two or three Merton men, who described the 'Methodists' in terms which gave him the impression that they were 'miserable enthusiasts and zealots.' Widening the circle of his inquiries, the result was the same. No one called in question the morals or the

integrity of the members of the 'Club,' but all the testimony was in support of the charges levelled against them by the writer in *Fog's Journal*. It was said 'that they pretended to be more religious than their neighbours; that they put a gloomy and melancholy face upon religion, and affected greater austerities and exemplariness than the doctrines of the gospel required.' Law was not satisfied with this universal condemnation of the 'Methodists,' and so he went about seeking for some one who was friendly to them, from whom he thought he might obtain a more favourable explanation of their conduct. It is a singular fact that, in the University of Oxford, no friends of the despised and hated 'Club' could be found. Law, therefore, was driven to seek the acquaintance of some of the Methodists themselves. He relied upon the fact that no one had called their probity and sincerity in question, and so he judged it safe to run the risk of listening to a description of their proceedings from their own lips. In July, 1732, he welcomed John Wesley to his house in Putney. That was the beginning of their personal acquaintance. They had a long conversation, and Law soon perceived that the unfavourable reports he had received were founded on ignorance and a lack of spiritual perception. He gathered the following facts from his visitor. In the latter end of the year 1729, three or four serious men agreed to pass certain evenings in every week together in order to study the classics. On Sunday they read a book of devotion. The following

## 170 The Revival of Religion in England

summer one of their number, Mr. William Morgan, called at the jail 'out of curiosity to see a man condemned for killing his wife.' Subsequently he told his companions that during his visit to the prison he had talked with one of the debtors, and he believed that it would do much good if a sober person would now and then take the trouble to converse with them. Being urgent about the matter, two of his companions, John and Charles Wesley, walked down with him to the castle, and they were all so well satisfied with their conversation there, that they agreed to visit the prisoners once or twice a week. Mr. Morgan soon after desired John Wesley to go with him to visit a poor woman in the town who was ill. Finding their advice well received, they determined now and then to pass an hour in such charitable visits. But it occurred to them that their visitation of the poor might give offence to the parish ministers, so they waited on those whose parishes they entered and requested their consent and approbation. In addition, they applied to Mr. Gerard, the chaplain to the Bishop of Oxford, the minister who had the care of prisoners under sentence of condemnation, for permission to visit them. They also asked him to allow one of their number, John Wesley, to preach to the prisoners once a month, if the bishop would consent. Mr. Gerard approved of the suggestion, and soon afterwards intimated that the bishop had given his permission, and had sent his hearty good wishes for the success of the attempt.

It will be seen that, in the matter of the visitation of the poor and the prisoners, the Methodists acted with caution, and with great respect for the ecclesiastical authorities. In order that they might avoid any irregularities, they took the advice of Samuel Wesley, the rector of Epworth, who wrote a letter to them which Law highly commends. The letter shows that the visitation of the prisoners was not a new thing in Oxford. Samuel Wesley says : ' Go on then, in God's name, in that path to which your Saviour has directed you, and that track wherein I have gone before you : for even when I was an undergraduate at Oxford, I visited those in the castle there, and can reflect on it with great satisfaction to this day.'

Upon these encouragements [says Law] the young gentlemen continued to meet together ; and the better to confirm themselves in the good course they had begun, they thought it requisite to communicate at the cathedral as often as they had opportunity, which was once a week ; and hence their ill-willers gave them the name of Sacramentarians. They continued their services to the poor prisoners ; visited such of their acquaintance as were sick, and several poor families besides in town, and made collections from the well-disposed, and among one another, to procure physic and other reliefs to the bodily necessities, as by their best advice and prayers they did to the spiritual wants, where needed ; and abridged themselves of some diversions and pleasures, in order to enable them to support the expence which attended this good course ; and not, as the gentleman assured me, from any melancholy habit, or gloominess of disposition, which this method had brought them into :



## 172 The Revival of Religion in England

For, as he declared, Religion is a cheerful thing, and the satisfactions they reaped from the sense of having performed what they took to be their duty, however imperfectly, were greater, and of a higher nature than any they ever had before experienced.<sup>1</sup>

William Law listened to John Wesley's explanations, weighed them, and found that the popular opinion in Oxford concerning the members of the 'Holy Club' was wrong. In his pamphlet, he states his conclusions in the following words—

That those gentlemen think themselves obliged in all particulars to live up to the law of the gospel: That the rule they have set themselves is not that of their own inventions, but the Holy Scriptures, and the Orders and Injunctions of the Church; and that, not as they perversely construe and misinterpret them, but as they find them in the Holy Canon: That, pursuant to these, they have resolved to observe with strictness all the duties of the Christian Religion according to their Baptismal Engagements, and particularly the Fasts, the Prayers and Sacraments of the Church; to receive the blessed Communion as often as there is opportunity; and to do all the good they can in visiting the sick, the poor, the prisoners, &c., knowing these to be the great articles on which they are to be tried at the Last Day; and in all things to keep themselves unspotted from the world. It would be found, that, if they rise earlier than ordinary, if they are sparing in eating or drinking, or any expensive diversions, 'tis to save time and money for improving those glorious ends; and not, as is unfairly insinuated, that they make such things to be essentials in religion, much less, out of a gloomy and

<sup>1</sup> p. 8.

Pharisaical spirit, to shun the company, or upbraid the practice of others. These are the Rules, this the method they have chosen to live by. . . . To live by rule, especially a good rule, was ever esteemed a sure sign of wisdom : to live by none, much more to be against all rule and method, must be a flagrant mark of folly. And I venture to add, that if these young gentlemen persevere to the end in this good method, they shall receive a crown of glory.<sup>1</sup>

In the pages of William Law's pamphlet we catch a clear sight of the 'Godly Club.' When we consider its purpose, its work, and the high character of its members, it is strange that those who watched its proceedings were unable to recognize and appreciate its meaning. The only explanation is that it was out of accord with the religious spirit of Oxford ; and, perhaps, that is the severest condemnation that can be passed on the moral condition and Christian tone of the University. At that time men hated 'seriousness,' self-restraint, discipline ; they ignored the duties of the rich to the poor, the cultured to the ignorant, the strong to the weak and helpless. They thought that work amongst debtors and condemned prisoners ought to be done by the people who were paid for doing it. As to religion, the anxiety of the Christian 'gentleman' was not to have too much of it. He thought it better to lead a self-indulgent, even a licentious life, rather than to run the danger of being considered an 'enthusiast.'

<sup>1</sup> pp. 21, 22.

## 174 The Revival of Religion in England

It is interesting to gather William Law's impression of John Wesley from his interview with him. He speaks of him as 'a very modest and ingenuous man'; and says that he was struck with his circumspection, and with the solid answers which he gave to the objections which might be urged against the proceedings of the 'Godly Club.' Those answers showed that 'their notions and principles were better considered and digested than their ill-wishers generally imagine them to be.'<sup>1</sup> It was clear also that Wesley was a man of the highest integrity, a man upon whose moral life even Rumour itself cast no aspersion. This glimpse of John Wesley is valuable. It shows us a man of religious fervour, high principle, and fine character, whose actions were regulated by convictions that were the result of deep, quiet thought concerning the meaning and obligations of the Christian life. There is no hectic flush upon the cheek, no unhealthy sparkle of the eye. In speech and bearing we note the presence of the 'cool spirit' which marks the man of understanding. Calm investigation had led him to see, before other religious people saw them, certain principles of life and conduct which are now admitted to be essential to the Christian character. The price he had to pay for his keener insight was suffering and contempt. Those are the rewards we generally give to the men who are in advance of their times on questions of morals and religion.

<sup>1</sup> p. 9.

It is well known that the members of the 'Club' never adopted the names that were flung at them. They might be called 'Sacramentarians,' 'Supererogation Men,' 'The Enthusiasts,' 'The Reforming Club,' the 'Holy Club,' the 'Godly Club,' or 'Methodists,' but they treated all these epithets as nicknames invented by sprightly wittlings. They were especially careful not to call themselves a 'club,' although the word was 'in the air.' But it had a sinister meaning. The clubs of London, even 'The Club,' of which Addison, Burke, Johnson, and Reynolds were members, were assemblies in which there was much dissipation. We are told that the 'common title' by which the Oxford Methodists were known was the 'Godly Club.' The name gave great offence to Samuel Wesley, John Wesley's brother. Because of his dislike of the term, it was suggested that the word 'Society' should be adopted, and that rules should be drawn up for the observance of its members. Writing to John Wesley, in July, 1733, Clayton says—

We had a deal of talk about your scheme of avowing yourselves a Society, and fixing upon a set of Rules. Mr. Deacon seemed to think that you had better let it alone, as it would be an additional tie upon yourselves, and perhaps a snare upon the consciences of those weak brethren that might come among you.

The word 'Society' was not formally adopted by the Oxford Methodists; but, inasmuch as it had received a religious meaning by its use by Dr. Horneck and



## 176 The Revival of Religion in England

Dr. Woodward, it lingered in the mind of Wesley until it became the inevitable word in the days when he commenced his evangelistic mission.

The 'Godly Club' was broken up and its members were dispersed. It had effected its purpose. Its leading idea was Christian philanthropy; its special mission was, primarily, to the 'bodies' of men. But the keen-eyed members of the club found that the two great commandments are inseparably knit together, and that the work of the philanthropist can only be properly done by those who submit themselves to all the laws of God. Constant communion with Christ in the sacrament seemed to these lonely workers essential to the performance of their duties. They fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoners, taught the children, distributed the Scriptures, and denied themselves of everything that savoured of luxury, that they might stand without rebuke before the Judge in the day of His coming. Their eyes were fixed on that day; and, as they knelt at the Lord's table week by week, the figure of Christ as their Judge became more clearly defined. When He stood before them, and their conscience recorded His words of sympathy and approval, they bent their heads humbly for His blessing; and then rose and passed through the crowded streets insensible to ribald scorn. Some persons seem to think that the discovery of the fact that 'men have bodies as well as souls' was reserved for the closing years of the nineteenth century. It

was made by the members of the 'Godly Club'; and throughout the long years of his evangelistic work John Wesley never lost sight of it. From dawn to evening twilight he was true to the philanthropies that beautify the religious life.

It is not necessary that we should specially allude to the episodes of John Wesley's career in Georgia. There are a few incidents, however, which arrest our eye when we glance over the events of that period. First of all, it must be remembered that he went out to America as a missionary. His secret wish was to preach the gospel to the Indians. The world-wide view which is such a conspicuous feature of the earliest Methodist hymns indicates that, from the first, Wesley's eye searched the flowing outline of his great 'parish.'

A second fact is also worthy of note. We find that Wesley's desire to avail himself of the advantages afforded by a Religious Society found expression when he was in America. Under date April 17, 1736, he wrote in his *Journal*—

Not finding, as yet, any door open for the pursuing of our main design, we considered in what manner we might be most useful to the little flock at Savannah. And we agreed : (1) To advise the more serious among them to form themselves into a sort of little Society, and to meet once or twice a week, in order to reprove, instruct, and exhort one another. (2) To select out of these a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other, which might be forwarded partly by our conversing singly with each, and

## 178 The Revival of Religion in England

partly by inviting them all together to our house ; and this accordingly we determined to do every Sunday in the afternoon.

But the aspect of John Wesley's life in America which most impresses us is that which is presented by his own religious experience. On his voyage from England, and also during his residence in Georgia, he came in contact with the Moravians, and their conduct and conversation made a deep impression on him. His association with them compelled him to face the question of his own religious condition. He found that the Moravians used the word 'faith' in a sense different from that in which he used it. He was a man who was impatient of obscurity ; he had a passion for clear-sighted views on all subjects, especially on those which concerned the salvation of the soul. When he conversed with Moravians whose character was blameless, and whose faces glowed with the delight of a divine happiness, he found that they held a view of faith which he could not understand. He believed himself to be a Christian. But he was not satisfied. The Moravians assured him that their joyous experience arose from the exercise of faith in Christ as a personal Saviour. He had faith, but it did not produce the effects which he saw in the men whose holy lives he admired. So he became dissatisfied, and could not rest until he had worked out the problem that continually haunted him. He saw, with a fine penetration, that the point on which he must concentrate his thoughts

was the character of his own faith. At that time he understood that 'saving faith' meant no more than 'a firm assent to all propositions contained in the Old and New Testaments.' That assent he gave with his whole heart, but he began to suspect that this faith was not 'saving faith.' When he questioned himself concerning his hope of salvation, he found satisfaction in remembering his good works and his own righteousness. This, he tells us, had been the ground of his hope from his youth. He discovered, to his surprise, that the Moravians placed no reliance on good works, and that they renounced their own righteousness; yet he saw that they rejoiced all the day in the consciousness of salvation. In his talks with them he was ever at cross purposes. For instance, one day he met Spangenberg, one of their pastors. Spangenberg inquired: 'Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?' John Wesley listened with amazement to these questions. He knew that they were expressed in scriptural language, but what they meant he could not divine. He gave no reply. Spangenberg, perceiving his embarrassment, pushed the question home. He asked, 'Do you know Jesus Christ?' Wesley paused to weigh his words, and then said, 'I know that He is the Saviour of the world.' 'True,' said Spangenberg; 'but do you know He has saved you?' 'I hope He has died to save me,' was the answer. 'Do you know yourself?' Spangenberg asked.



## 180 The Revival of Religion in England

In his perplexity he replied, 'I do.' But he confesses in his *Journal* that they were 'vain words.' Reflecting on his conversation with Spangenberg, Wesley must have been convinced that the mystery he was trying to understand had been darkened. 'What is saving faith?' That was the question which was still unanswered when he stepped ashore in England after his disappointing experiences in Georgia.

It is sometimes said that the doctrine of saving faith, which afterwards became so prominent in the teaching of the evangelists of the revival, is Moravian in its origin. That is a mistake. We have seen that George Whitefield, and Howell Harris who did not come into contact with any human instructor, solved the problem that so long baffled the keen intelligence of John Wesley. By the exercise of faith in a crucified Saviour they both found pardon, and entered on the joyous experiences of the new life. As a matter of fact, the way leading to pardon lies distinctly marked in the formularies of the Church of England. The 'intolerable burden' of sin; the deliverance that comes through the Cross and Passion of the Lord; the assurance that forgiveness follows true repentance and unfeigned belief of the gospel,—these were the truths that were constantly sounded in the ears of the men and women who bowed at the table of the Lord, or knelt in the parish churches of England. It should be remembered that during the Great Revival men entered into the experience of salvation when the

Liturgy and the Litany were read. One Sunday morning, for instance, as Daniel Rowlands was reading the Litany in Llangeitho Church, a great wave of spiritual emotion rolled over the worshippers when he repeated the words: 'By Thine agony and bloody sweat; by Thy cross and passion; by Thy precious death and burial; by Thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost.' At this point some fell silent on the floor of the church, while many, through their tears, cried, 'Good Lord, deliver us.' Those heart-subduing sentences had been spoken by clergymen and murmured by people for generations, and their meaning had scarcely been guessed. When it flashed out of the well-worn words, the Cross of Christ was revealed to penitent sinners as the only means of salvation. The evangelists were right when they affirmed that they preached no new doctrine; that they only proclaimed the truths contained in and affirmed by the Bible and the formularies of the Church of England.

Carrying with him the load of his perplexity, baffled by problems that were beyond his power of solution, plunged in great spiritual darkness, Wesley joined his friends in London. He stayed in the house of the Rev. John Hutton, who resided in College Street, Westminster. Mr. Hutton was a clergyman who, having resigned his living because of conscientious scruples, settled in London, and boarded several boys of Westminster School in his house. Mr. Hutton,

## 182 The Revival of Religion in England

who is described as a devout and pious man, opened his house as a meeting-place for one of the Religious Societies. His son, James Hutton, was well known to John and Charles Wesley. The acquaintance was formed while James Hutton was visiting some of the Westminster boys who had gone to Oxford. During his visit he met both John and Charles Wesley. Understanding that they sometimes came to London and stayed with their brother Samuel, a master in Westminster School, who lived next door to the Huttons in College Street, James Hutton invited them to come to his father's house the next time they were in town. The invitation was accepted when John and Charles Wesley were on their way to Georgia. During this visit John Wesley preached a sermon that deeply impressed James Hutton and his sister. Its subject was 'The one thing needful—the renovation of fallen man.' James Hutton had 'lived very wildly in the world,' but now he 'turned round' and became earnest in his religious life. The Religious Society in his father's house was also quickened, and entered upon a more vigorous life.

When James Hutton was out of his apprenticeship he commenced business on his own account, in a shop called 'The Bible and Sun,' which stood next to the Rose Tavern, a little to the west of Temple Bar. In this house he gathered together a Religious Society. The condition of some of the Societies, both in town and country, was unsatisfactory. Hutton himself says

that they had so settled down into lifelessness that the majority of their members 'were altogether slumbering or dead souls, who cared for nothing but their comfort in this world.' The preaching of Whitefield, however, had roused the London Societies, and the religious tone of many of them was improved. Hutton, however, was dissatisfied with the old Societies. He thought they were founded on wrong lines, and he determined to form Societies of a different type. In addition to the Society which met at the 'Bible and Sun,' we find from his *Memoirs*, by Benham, that he was an active supporter, if not the founder, of a meeting for Christian fellowship at Islington. He was, however, obliged to give it up, because he could not secure proper persons to conduct it. With another Society he was more successful. He engaged a room in Nettleton Court, Aldersgate Street, where, his biographer tells us, 'he met a small Society every week for mutual edification.'<sup>1</sup> It is only necessary, further, to say that the Society which met in James Hutton's house grew rapidly. It was well organized and worked. At last the house became too small for its accommodation, and it was removed to the chapel at No. 32, Fetter Lane, where it entered upon a remarkable career.<sup>2</sup>

The great transition in the spiritual life of John Wesley is closely connected with James Hutton. We have spoken of Wesley's confusion of mind and acute

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



## 184 The Revival of Religion in England

distress in the presence of the problem of saving faith, and we must once more stand by his side in the darkness and watch the course and the result of the conflict which he fought with intense earnestness. We will gather the incidents that led to his deliverance from the darkness from the pages of his own *Journal*.

After an absence of more than two years, John Wesley found himself again in London. He had changed intellectually and religiously. Among other things, he had got light upon the subject on which he preached in John Hutton's house before leaving for Georgia—'The renovation of fallen man.' He acutely felt the necessity of that renovation, although he was bewildered as to the means whereby it was to be effected. The subject so stirred his heart that he preached on it, in the Church of St. John the Evangelist, on February 5, 1738. He took Whitefield's great text, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.' He must have spoken plain truths, for he was informed that 'many of the best in the parish' were so offended that it had been decided he was not to preach in the church any more. The next Sunday he preached in St. Andrew's, Holborn, on the words, 'Though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.' Again he annoyed his hearers, and the church was closed against him.

Between the dates of the sermons in these two churches, an event occurred to which Wesley gives

special prominence in his *Journal*. He calls Tuesday, February 7, 1738, 'a day much to be remembered.' At the house of Mr. Weinantz, a Dutch merchant, he met Peter Böhler and two of his companions, Moravians, who had just landed from Germany. Finding that they had no acquaintance in England, he offered to procure lodgings for them. He did so, in a house near that of Mr. John Hutton, where he himself was then staying. This brought him into constant communication with them. He soon found a kindred spirit in Böhler, a man of lofty moral and religious character. On Friday, February 17, John Wesley and Peter Böhler set out on a visit to Oxford. They relieved the tedium of travel by constant conversation on the deep things of God. Böhler was impressed with Wesley's acuteness of mind, and his way of insisting that reason should be the ruler of thought and action. In their conversations about religion they occupied distinct, and almost opposite, standpoints. Böhler talked about faith, Wesley reasoned; and they perplexed each other. At last Böhler cried, 'My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away.' Wesley stared at him. He could not understand the meaning of such an assertion. After spending a few days in Oxford, Wesley returned to London, but was summoned back to Oxford by the news that his brother Charles was dying. He hurried to his bedside, and found him recovering, Peter Böhler being with him.

## 186 The Revival of Religion in England

On Sunday, March 5, a memorable conversation took place between John Wesley and Peter Böhler. In his *Journal* Wesley says: 'I was clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.'

Being 'clearly convinced' that it is 'by faith alone we are saved,' Wesley, driven out of his old position, tried to accustom his eyes to the new light that had streamed upon him. One thing was certain. If it is by 'faith alone' that salvation comes, then it had not come to him. On Thursday, March 23, after several days' absence from Oxford, he returned to the city, and closely conversed with Peter Böhler. He was 'amazed more and more' by the account Böhler gave of 'the fruits of living faith—the holiness and happiness which he affirmed to attend it.' The next morning he began the Greek Testament again, resolving to abide by 'the law and the testimony'; being confident that God would thereby show him whether this strange doctrine was true.

On Saturday, April 22, Wesley met Peter Böhler once more. Their conversation revealed the progress which Wesley had made. He had reached the conclusion that faith, to use the words of the Church, is 'a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God.' He also was convinced that both happiness and holiness were fruits of this living faith. That happiness, he had learned,

arose out of a consciousness of a changed relation to God. In his reading his attention had been arrested by the two statements of Scripture to which Spangenberg had alluded in the questions put to him in Georgia: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God'; and 'He that believeth hath the witness in himself.' Wesley had read these texts many a time, but a new light had broken out of them, and he found that they had meanings of which he had never dreamed. That faith led to holiness was equally clear to him, from the statement, 'Whosoever believeth is born of God,' and 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.' Thus far he had travelled, but there he stopped. Böhler's assertion that faith could be given in a moment staggered him. How could a man be turned in a moment from darkness to light, from sin and misery to righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost? In his perplexity he once more took up his Testament, and read the Acts of the Apostles. To his astonishment, he found 'scarce any instances there of other than instantaneous conversions; scarce any so slow as that of St. Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth.' He put aside his Bible with the thought that such sudden changes might occur in the Apostolic age, but that the times were so changed that there was no reason to believe that God now worked in the same manner.

Wesley was accustomed to appeal, first to the



## 188 The Revival of Religion in England

Scriptures, and afterwards to experience. On the crucial question of the instantaneousness of conversion, after consulting his New Testament, he turned to the evidence of witnesses. Several persons testified to him that 'God had thus wrought in themselves, giving them in a moment such a faith in the blood of His Son, as translated them out of darkness into light, out of sin and fear into holiness and happiness.' He laid down his weapons; he could no longer resist the combined voice of Scripture and experience. He ceased his disputings, and cried, 'Lord, help Thou my unbelief.'

Peter Böhler, before sailing for Carolina, had another man to instruct and convince. On Wednesday, May 3, 1738, he had a long and particular conversation with Charles Wesley. The result was that God opened the eyes of the latter to see clearly 'what was the nature of that one true, living faith, whereby alone "through grace we are saved."' On May 21, 1738, Charles Wesley was added to the number of those who testified that God had translated them out of darkness into marvellous light.

When Peter Böhler left England, John Wesley sorely missed his companionship. But he acted on the advice that had been given him: 'Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.' He did not possess saving faith, but in several churches he proclaimed the doctrine that had become clear to his intellect. His hearers were

scandalized by his teaching, and again and again he was informed: 'Sir, you must preach here no more.'

On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, May 22, 23, and 24, Wesley tells us that he had 'continual sorrow and heaviness' in his heart. But deliverance was nigh. About five o'clock in the morning of May 24, he opened his Testament and read the words, 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. i. 4). Then, just before he went out, he again opened the book, and his eye fell on the words, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.'

In the afternoon of this eventful day, Wesley, being asked to go to St. Paul's, consented. His feelings found expression in the words of the anthem—

Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord :  
Lord, hear my voice. O let Thine ears consider well the  
voice of my complaint. If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme  
to mark what is done amiss: O Lord, who may abide it?  
For there is mercy with Thee; therefore shalt Thou be  
feared. O Israel, trust in the Lord: for with the Lord  
there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.  
And He shall redeem Israel from all his sins.

The *De profundis* must have ministered to his storm-tost mind. When he went down the cathedral steps and made his way through the streets of London, he carried music in his heart. If he had consulted his own wishes, we imagine that he would have

## 190 The Revival of Religion in England

hidden himself in his lodgings, and there brooded over the problems that filled him with awe. But he was not destined to spend the rest of the day in seclusion. In the evening, 'very unwillingly,' he went to a Society which met in Aldersgate Street. It is reasonable to suppose that it was the Society which had been formed and which was conducted by James Hutton in Nettleton Court. Wesley must describe in his own words the great event which happened in the obscure 'Society' room on that critical evening. He says—

One was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

The strange warmth in his heart caused him, first of all, to pray with all his might for those who had, in a more especial manner, despitely used and persecuted him. Then, rising in the midst of the little group, he bore testimony to the fact that he was conscious of personal salvation. Soon he heard a whisper in his heart, 'This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?'

Then [says he] was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation;

but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsels of His own will.

Wesley had discovered the meaning of saving faith. Better than that, he had exercised it; and the result was peace, and victorious resistance to temptation. But he wondered that the coming of joy was delayed. He determined to retire for a short time into Germany. At Marienborn, at one of the conferences for strangers, he heard Count Zinzendorf discourse on a topic that intensely interested him. The question under consideration was, 'Can a man be justified and not know it?' With the exception of the assertion that 'to be justified is the same thing as to be born of God,' Wesley considered that the Count's teaching was Scriptural. He sums it up as follows—

1. Justification is the forgiveness of sins.
2. The moment a man flies to Christ, he is justified.
3. He has peace with God; but not always joy.
4. Nor, perhaps, may he know he is justified till long after.
5. For the assurance of it is distinct from justification itself.
6. But others may know he is justified by his power over sin, by his seriousness, his love of the brethren, and his 'hunger and thirst after righteousness,' which alone prove the spiritual life to be begun.

Wesley found that this teaching reminded him of Peter Böhler's. He employed his time in Germany in seeking interviews with Christian men, and in



## 192 The Revival of Religion in England

noting the varying characteristics of their experiences. With an open mind he sought light upon the problems of salvation.

Wesley returned to England about the middle of September, and at once commenced to preach in such churches as were open to him. He also proclaimed the gospel to the condemned felons in Newgate. We notice that he spoke 'the truth in love' to the Aldersgate Street Society. 'Some contradicted at first, but not long; so that nothing but love appeared at our parting.' A month after landing in England from Germany he wrote in his *Journal* a careful review of his spiritual condition. We see that he has still to record—

I have not that joy in the Holy Ghost; no settled, lasting joy. Nor have I such a peace as excludes the possibility either of fear or doubt.

He goes further, and says—

When holy men have told me I had no faith, I have often doubted whether I had or no. And those doubts have made me very uneasy, till I was relieved by prayer and the Holy Scriptures.

He ends his description of his spiritual condition with the words—

I nevertheless trust that I have a measure of faith, and am 'accepted in the Beloved': I trust 'the handwriting that was against me is blotted out'; and that I am reconciled to God through His Son.

Such was John Wesley's spiritual position nearly six months after the experience that came to him in the Aldersgate Street room. It was only gradually that he learned to be content with the fact that faith is the one thing needful for salvation. When he saw that clearly, then he was thankful for peace, and waited patiently for the joy of the Lord.

We have had an opportunity of watching the processes by which the most prominent evangelists of the Great Revival entered into the experiences which qualified them for their work. We have seen that each advanced in his own way towards the goal; swiftly or slowly, according to temperament, each passed into the light. They trod the same path to the cross. Faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour brought the warmth of divine love into their hearts; that love kindled an enthusiasm for holiness, and made them the antagonists of sin. In some cases the battle against sin was accompanied by a sense of fellowship with Christ that made the struggle a rapture; in others, the fight was a distress. But, whether in gladness or in gloom, the contest was waged, and the victory was won. Can it be supposed that men, who had reached the assurance of salvation through such different experiences, would afterwards teach that conversion is a stereotyped process? John Wesley, in one of the earliest accounts he gives of the conversion of those 'whose sins were of the most

## 194 The Revival of Religion in England

flagrant kind,' and of 'the Pharisees, the righteous that needed no repentance,' says—

The manner wherein God hath wrought this work in many souls is as strange as the work itself. It has generally, if not always, been wrought in one moment. 'As the lightning shining from heaven,' so was 'the coming of the Son of Man,' either to bring peace or a sword; either to wound or to heal; either to convince of sin or to give remission of sins in His blood.

The cautionary words, 'generally, if not always,' indicate that Wesley knew that there were varieties of experience in the cases of those who, by the exercise of a living faith, entered into the consciousness of personal salvation.

2 A second fact is demonstrated by our description of John Wesley's conversion. In following his spiritual progress, we are impressed with his perfect sanity. He would not be dragged along any path blindfold. He must have reason, the Scriptures, and experience to light the way. Unhasting and unresting he proceeded with measured steps until the critical moment arrived. When the new revelation came, and the power to exercise faith was given, all that had come to him through reading, prayer, and deep brooding on the subjects which had perplexed his thoughts, told upon that act of faith. When he accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, and felt the strange warmth in his heart, he was not a wild enthusiast, but a self-restrained and well-instructed man. The more

thoroughly we investigate his experiences, the more completely do we exonerate him from the charge of 'fanaticism.' That charge reveals the religious condition of the men who make it. They have no eyes to see the things of the kingdom of God; they stand, dazed and blinded, in the presence of spiritual experiences which are clearly understood by multitudes of Christian people throughout the world.

We cannot close our recital of the events which occurred in the dawn of the Great Revival without emphasizing a fact on which we have already touched. We have seen that the first evangelists of the Revival found the pardon of their sins by exercising a living faith in a crucified Saviour. When they afterwards bore their testimony to this fact, their witness stirred up bitter hostility. The parish ministers assailed them, and sober-minded laymen, as well as frantic mobs, joined in the attack. The doctrine which they taught concerning the forgiveness of sins, which was founded on the Word of God and their own experience, was considered to be new, and therefore false and dangerous. Yet all the time, as we have suggested, it was speaking in vain from the formularies of the English Church.

The eleventh of the 'Articles of Religion' plainly says—

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we



## 196 The Revival of Religion in England

are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

In the *Book of Homilies*, the 'Homily of Justification' appears under the title, 'A Sermon of the Salvation of Mankind by only Christ our Saviour from sin and death everlasting.' It opens with these words—

Because all men be sinners and offenders against God, and breakers of His law and commandments, therefore can no man by his own acts, works, and deeds, seem they never so good, be justified and made righteous before God ; but every man of necessity is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands, that is to say, the remission, pardon, and forgiveness of his sins and trespasses in such things as he hath offended. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive by God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification.<sup>1</sup>

In these remarkable sentences the writer of the Homily defines the position which he afterwards explains and defends. In his defence of the statement that we are justified 'only by a true and lively faith in Christ,' he shows that such was the teaching of the 'old doctors.' He quotes St. Hilary, St. Basil, and St. Ambrose. He specially emphasizes the words of St. Ambrose: 'This is the ordinance of God, that he which believeth in Christ should be saved without

<sup>1</sup> *Certain Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth*, p. 20 (S.P.C.K. ed.).

works, by faith only, freely receiving remission of his sins.' The writer of the 'sermon' invites the reader to consider diligently the statement, 'Without works, by faith only, freely we receive remission of our sins.' Then, as if to drive them home, he repeats them in a slightly different form. He asks, 'What can be spoken more plainly than to say that freely, without works, by faith only, we obtain remission of our sins?'<sup>1</sup> Not content with quoting the opinions of St. Hilary, St. Basil, and St. Ambrose in defence of his position, he asserts that similar views are to be found in Origen, St. Chrysostom, St. Cyprian, St. Augustine, Anselm, and other Greek and Latin authors. Fortified by this agreement of the Fathers, he continues—

This faith the Holy Scripture teacheth: this is the strong rock and foundation of Christian religion: this doctrine all old and ancient authors of Christ's Church do approve: this doctrine advanceth and setteth forth the true glory of Christ, and beateth down the vain glory of man: this whosoever denieth is not to be counted for a true Christian man, nor for a setter forth of Christ's glory, but for an adversary of Christ and His gospel, and for a setter forth of man's vain glory.<sup>2</sup>

The writer of the Homily is aware that the doctrine that faith alone justifies may be so taught as to be dangerous. He therefore guards it by careful exposition. His conception of its true meaning is given in the following words—

<sup>1</sup> pp. 24, 25.

<sup>2</sup> pp. 25, 26.

## 198 The Revival of Religion in England

The true understanding and meaning thereof is, that, although we hear God's Word and believe it, although we have faith, hope, and charity, repentance, dread, and fear of God within us, and do never so many good works thereunto, yet we must renounce the merit of all our said virtues of faith, hope, charity, and all our other virtues and good deeds, which we either have done, shall do, or can do, as things that be far too weak and insufficient and imperfect to deserve remission of our sins and our justification; and therefore we must trust only in God's mercy, and in that sacrifice which our High Priest and Saviour Christ Jesus, the Son of God, once offered for us upon the Cross, to obtain thereby God's grace and remission, as well of our original sin in baptism, as of all actual sin committed by us after our baptism, if we truly repent and turn unfeignedly to Him again.

When we carefully weigh the words of the Homily of Justification, and remember that the eleventh Article has to be read in their light, we find that it is absolutely true that the doctrine Wesley preached regarding the justification of a sinner is the doctrine of the Church of England. Upon this fact he insisted, and his statement was vehemently attacked. But his assailants suffered from the inconveniences of ignorance. They may have had some slight knowledge of the Articles of Religion; but few of them knew anything about the Homily of Justification. Many of the parish ministers were too deeply interested in other pursuits to spend much time in becoming familiar with the teachings of their Church. When they heard Wesley assert that 'without works, by

faith only, freely we receive the remission of our sins,' they knew that they had never preached such a doctrine themselves, and that they had never heard any one else preach it. They, therefore, rushed to the conclusion that it was a new-fangled theory that had sprung from the heated brain of an 'enthusiast.' To reason with a man who seemed to be suffering from mischievous theological delusions was a waste of time, and so they shut him out of their churches.

The eighteenth century presents many scenes which stir our wonder and excite our sympathy, but few are more remarkable and pathetic than the spectacle of the exclusion of John Wesley from the Church of England for proclaiming a doctrine which stands clearly writ in the 'Articles of Religion' and the 'Sermon of Salvation.' When we remember that the men who cast Wesley out into the wilderness held their 'livings' because they had signed the 'Articles' in token of their belief in the teaching they contained, the exclusion of Wesley by the parish ministers must be considered as a striking example of the irony of history.



## VIII

## The Revival in England

AFTER his conversion, John Wesley identified himself with the Religious Society that met in Fetter Lane. He retained his connexion with it for more than a year. That Society gradually came under the controlling influence of the Moravians. It was not until 1742 that it was formally settled 'as a congregation of the Church of the Brethren'; and it is a noteworthy fact that, even after its settlement, it was looked upon as 'a Society in the Church of England in union with the Brethren.'<sup>1</sup> Owing to circumstances which we need not detail, John Wesley withdrew from it towards the close of July, 1740.

In the interval between Wesley's conversion and his separation from the Fetter Lane Society, events occurred which determined his career as an evangelist. It is interesting to trace the path he followed, and to see how he was led to the work which resulted in the awakening of England.

George Whitefield's visit to America was brief.

<sup>1</sup> Benham's *Memoir of James Hutton*, p. 89.

On November 30, 1738, he landed in England. He hastened to London, and found, to his disappointment, that it was difficult to obtain permission to preach in the churches. 'Five churches,' he writes, 'have been already denied me; and some of the clergy, if possible, would oblige me to depart out of these coasts.'<sup>1</sup> With few exceptions the parish ministers closed their churches against him. He went to Oxford, and having been ordained 'priest' on January 14, 1739, he returned to London, and tried once more to obtain opportunities for preaching. It was during this visit that an unfortunate event occurred. On Sunday, February 4, 1739, Whitefield was present at a service in St. Margaret's, Westminster. At that church a 'Friendly Society' had arranged one of its 'weekly lectures' on the date just named, but the lecturer, Mr. Morgan, was obliged to be absent from town. He had, however, secured a substitute. Unaware of the fact that another minister was to take Mr. Morgan's place, the officers of the 'Friendly Society' went to Whitefield, and asked him to preach. He consented, and the two preachers met in St. Margaret's. When Whitefield found that Mr. Morgan's substitute was present, he wished to retire, but the officers of the Society insisted on his preaching, and he consented. His action caused an unseemly disturbance in the church, and immediately provoked an angry controversy in the newspapers. The news was spread through the country; the incident

<sup>1</sup> Tyerman's *Life of George Whitefield*, vol. i. p. 149.

## 202 The Revival of Religion in England

was much exaggerated by the voice of rumour, and it is indisputable that it roused the anger of the parish clergy against Whitefield, and profoundly affected his subsequent career.

Whitefield set out for the West of England. On February 14, 1739, he reached Bristol to find that the *Weekly Miscellany*, containing a highly-coloured account of the service in St. Margaret's, had arrived in the city, and that its description of the event was beginning to tell against him. The next morning he waited on the Vicar of St. Mary Redcliffe, the Chancellor of the Diocese, and the Dean of Bristol, and found that there was strong opposition to his preaching in the city churches. The Vicar of St. Mary Redcliffe told him that he could not lend his church without a special order from the Chancellor; the Chancellor declined to issue such an order, but stated that if any clergyman thought proper to lend his church to Whitefield he would not prohibit it; and the Dean promised to send for him at another time and let him know whether there was 'any just objection' against his preaching in the churches.

In the afternoon of the same day, Whitefield found a place where he might preach. It was the city prison. The governor, Mr. Dagge, had heard him preach in 1737, and had received and believed the message of salvation. Mr. Dagge has been immortalized by Dr. Johnson in his *Life* of the poet Savage. That vagrant and unfortunate genius found

himself, at the close of his wanderings, in Bristol prison, and Johnson says: 'During the whole time of his imprisonment the keeper continued to treat him with the utmost tenderness and civility. Virtue is undoubtedly most laudable in that state which makes it most difficult, and therefore the humanity of a jailor certainly deserves this public attestation; and the man whose heart has not been hardened by such an employment may be justly proposed as a pattern of benevolence. If an inscription was once engraved "to the honest toll-gatherer," less honours ought not to be paid "to the tender jailor."' Savage died in Bristol in 1743, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Peter's, the 'tender jailor' defraying the cost of the funeral. Whitefield applied to Mr. Dagge for permission to minister to the prisoners, and his request was immediately granted. He preached a sermon on 'the penitent thief,' and then made arrangements for regular services in the prison. These services were continued until they were stopped by the mayor and sheriffs, who absolutely commanded Mr. Dagge not to allow Whitefield to preach in the prison again. They alleged, as their reason, that he 'insisted upon the necessity of our being born again,' and such a doctrine, in the opinion of the civic authorities, was unfit for the ears of debtors and criminals.

When Whitefield surveyed the situation in the evening of February 15, he must have seen that it had greatly changed since his previous visit, when he



## 204 The Revival of Religion in England

moved the whole city by his preaching. His conversation with the ecclesiastical authorities convinced him of their prejudice against him. In justice to them, it must be remembered that Whitefield had no licence to preach in the diocese, and that the news of the disturbance at St. Margaret's was common talk in Bristol. From his reception by the Chancellor and the Dean, he rightly judged that the churches would be denied him. He had, therefore, only the prospect of preaching in the prison, and to the Religious Societies in their 'rooms.' To a man possessing his temperament and convictions such a restriction of his work must have been insupportable. As he surveyed the prospect we think that he remembered a sentence spoken in Bristol during his previous visit. When he had announced that it was his intention to go to Georgia, some one said that 'if he had a mind to convert Indians, he might go among the Kingswood colliers and find Indians enough there.' The suggestion took definite shape in his mind, and he determined to act upon it. Without waiting for any further negotiations with Chancellor, Dean, or Bishop, on Saturday, February 17, 1739, with William Seward and another friend, he went to Kingswood, and, after dinner, stood upon a mount and preached to upwards of two hundred people who clustered around him.

Kingswood occupies such an important place in the history of the Great Revival that it merits special attention.

In ancient days a great forest spread through Gloucestershire and Somerset. In the light of early English history we see a remnant of the old woodlands, about seven miles in length, and varying in width from two to five miles. It was still unspoilt. Through its glades herds of deer wandered, and its quietness was rarely disturbed save by the sound of the hunter's horn. About the year 1200, coal was discovered in the forest; and gradually the beauty of the wood was besmirched, and disappeared. It was found that a considerable belt of the forest, about four miles in width, and running north and south, contained coal. As the mines were opened and worked the trees were felled. Their destruction was hastened by the ruthless cutting down of timber for the supply of the pressing pecuniary needs of divers kings. In 1673 the aspect of the wood had changed. The collieries numbered seventy-two. In 1734 they had more than doubled. When Whitefield visited the place, though some portion of the wood remained, thousands of colliers lived and worked within the boundaries of the old forest.

The portion of the King's wood left as a chase lay in the parishes of St. Philip and St. Jacob, Stapleton, Mangotsfield, and Bitton. It might have been thought that the ecclesiastical authorities of these parishes would have made some arrangement to meet the religious needs of the people who herded in the huts that stood among the black heaps of the forest. But

## 206 The Revival of Religion in England

neither church nor school was to be found within the area of the wood. The colliers' children grew up in practical heathenism. As for the colliers themselves, they seemed to be beyond the reach of Christian influence. They formed a population that displayed every vice that disfigured the England of the eighteenth century. They were ignorant, violent, brutal, blasphemous, drunken, criminal. They were the terror of Bristol. When work was scarce and bread was dear, the whisper that the Kingswood colliers were on the march for the city caused a shudder among the shopkeepers, and stirred the civic authorities into wild activity.

The reproach which rests upon the Church of England because of its neglect of the Kingswood colliers is slightly mitigated by the fact that, in 1738, Mr. Morgan, who is described as 'a serious and awakened clergyman,' pitying their rude and ignorant condition, sometimes preached to them in the fields. It is interesting to note that his services were held in or near Rose Green, the place where Whitefield, a year later, commenced his great campaign. Mr. Morgan subsequently joined the Quakers, and was well known as a preacher among the 'Friends' in Bristol.

Returning from Rose Green to his sister's house in Wine Street, Whitefield found that his prospects had suddenly improved. The next day he not only preached at Newgate, but also in St. Werburgh's, and also, to his astonishment, in St. Mary Redcliffe.

At St. Mary Redcliffe, that beautiful church that fascinates the antiquary and charms the lover of noble architecture, he had such a congregation as his eyes had never before seen. Many persons had to turn away from the doors, so great was the crowd, and the vicar welcomed him with 'exceeding civility.' The next day he preached to a great multitude in the parish church of St. Philip and St. Jacob, and collected eighteen pounds for his Orphan House in Georgia.

The gleam of bright spring sunshine that had fallen on Whitefield's fortunes soon faded. On Tuesday, February 20, he was served with a summons demanding his appearance before the Chancellor of the Diocese. After a somewhat sharp interchange of questions and answers, the Chancellor said to him: 'I am resolved, sir, if you preach or expound anywhere in this diocese, till you have a licence, I will first suspend, and then excommunicate you.' Showing Whitefield to the door, he dismissed him with the words: 'What I do is in the name of the clergy and laity of the city of Bristol.'

In his dilemma Whitefield determined to write to the Bishop of Bristol. At that time Dr. Butler, the famous author of *The Analogy of Religion*, presided over the diocese. The Bishop replied in a letter which seems to have given Whitefield some satisfaction, but which did not give him any solid ground for hoping that he would be allowed to preach in the churches. After this letter he saw clearly that he must set his face in the direction of the Religious Societies, and of



## 208 The Revival of Religion in England

field-preaching. We can understand his disappointment; but he showed his wisdom by submitting to the inevitable.

Whitefield continued his work among the Kingswood colliers. From February 17 to April 2, he preached about twenty times in different parts of Kingswood, including Rose Green, Hanham Mount, and the Fish Ponds. The congregations grew in numbers. The colliers flocked to hear him; then the Bristol people streamed out of the city, and swelled the great crowds that stood before him. A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*<sup>1</sup> says that on one occasion—

he preached at Hanham Mount to five or six thousand persons, and, in the evening, removed to the Common, about half a mile further, where three mounts and the plains around were crowded with so great a multitude of coaches, foot and horsemen, that they covered three acres, and were computed at twenty thousand people.

The success of the preaching-services was not confined to Kingswood. At Coalpit Heath Whitefield's congregation numbered two thousand. In Bristol he gathered 'many thousands' about him in the yard of the glass-house. While he was preaching there a drunken 'gentleman' interrupted the service. He called Whitefield a 'dog,' and told him that he ought to be whipped at the cart's tail. Turning to the

<sup>1</sup> 1739, p. 162.

crowd, he offered money to any who would pelt the preacher. Instead of pelting the preacher, some began to 'cast stones and dirt' at the interrupter; and the incident closed. In the city, also, a large bowling-green was lent to Whitefield. He preached there twice in the last week of March. On the first occasion he had a congregation of about five thousand people. Describing the second service, he says—

I believe seven or eight thousand people were present. The sun shone bright, and the windows and balconies of the adjoining houses were filled with hearers. Many were very faint because of the throng, which was so exceedingly great that they trod one upon another.

He was quick to recognize the advantage which was afforded him by these great open-air assemblies. When the mayor and sheriffs forbade him to preach any more in the prison, he writes—

Blessed be God ! All things happen for the furtherance of the gospel. I now preach to ten times more people than I should if I had been confined to the churches.

In addition to his open-air work, Whitefield found that the meetings of the Religious Societies gave him opportunities for usefulness. The 'rooms' in Baldwin Street and Nicholas Street were crowded. The 'room' of the Society at Lawford's Gate, which seems to have been connected with the poor-house, was sometimes so thronged that he had to preach from the steps leading to the door, or to stand at the window and preach

## 210 The Revival of Religion in England

to those outside and within. In the Nicholas Street 'room' a charity school was opened. When it was commenced a collection was taken, and Whitefield stood at the door, hat in hand, receiving the money that was thrown in by a generous people.

But the time rapidly approached when Whitefield had to quit Bristol, and to prepare for his second voyage to America. He found himself embarrassed by his success as a preacher. He was anxious for the continuance of his work, and looked about for a man who could take his place. His thoughts turned towards John Wesley, who at that time was closely associated with the Fetter Lane Religious Society. We suspect that Whitefield had his doubts concerning the willingness of Wesley to undertake the kind of work which he had begun in Bristol and Kingswood. So far as the Religious Societies were concerned he would not anticipate any difficulty ; but he must have known that Wesley would be strongly prejudiced against the irregularity of preaching in the open air. It is true that Wesley, when in America, had sometimes preached to his congregation under the trees when the sultry weather made the inside of a church unendurable ; but the blustering winds of an English March rob a man of that excuse for field-preaching. Whitefield knew that Wesley instinctively shrank from eccentric proceedings, and always sought to regulate his actions by reason, good taste, and precedent. But the rapid approach of the crisis compelled Whitefield to come

to a decision. Whatever might become of his work among the colliers, and the crowds that thronged the bowling-green, he was convinced that Wesley would not hesitate to take care of the Religious Societies, so he wrote to him and asked him to supply his place and carry on his work in Bristol. Wesley considered the invitation, and, after seeking advice, he determined to accept it.

On Saturday, March 31, 1739, John Wesley rode from Basingstoke to Bristol. Reaching the city, he found that it was market day. The streets were crowded, but he made his way between the lines of stalls which nearly blocked the narrow thoroughfares, and entered Wine Street. At that time Wine Street, at its junction with Broad Street, was only seventeen feet wide, its scanty width being still further diminished, at one point, by the whipping-post and pillory. Through this narrow way he walked until he paused at a grocer's shop that belonged to Mr. Greville. Mr. Greville had married Whitefield's sister, and, as we have seen, Whitefield had made his home with his sister during his stay in Bristol. When Wesley entered the shop he found that Whitefield had not come in, so he waited for him. Soon he arrived, and the two friends clasped hands. The imagination lingers on the scene, and pictures the meeting of the self-restrained, refined man, with the Miltonic face, and the young orator, charged with magnetism, overflowing with high spirits, and flushed with the



## 212 The Revival of Religion in England

excitement of splendid adventures. It was a fateful interview. When we remember its influence on the destiny of England, we feel that it is impossible to express all that it meant for the nation and the world.

Wesley and Whitefield would, doubtless, converse freely about the evangelistic work that was being done in Bristol, and the conversation would make Wesley acquainted with the peculiar conditions of that work. He would see that the task before him was formidable. Whitefield's youthful enthusiasm made him blind to difficulties; Wesley saw them clearly. His age and temperament made him cautious. He was in his thirty-seventh year; Whitefield was only twenty-four. He was a man of steady brain, who was accustomed to weigh all things in the scales of a finely balanced judgement. He was also scrupulous in all matters concerning ecclesiastical order. When Whitefield told him about his exclusion from the churches, and described dramatically his interviews with the Dean and Chancellor, Wesley would listen with sharp attention. We have seen that as a member of the Holy Club at Oxford he had been careful to act in harmony with the parish clergy and with the recognized authorities. It is true that he and his brother had been excluded from the London churches, but such exclusion had not led them, up to that time, to rebel against ecclesiastical authority. When Whitefield went on to describe the incidents of his field-preaching, Wesley found that the

current of sympathy between himself and his friend was interrupted. He tells us frankly—

I could scarce reconcile myself to this strange way of preaching in the fields ; having been all my life, till very lately, so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church.

And so he would listen to Whitefield with a disturbed mind in Mr. Greville's house that night. At this distance of time, knowing subsequent facts, we may be a little impatient with the prudence of Wesley ; but we must remember that the observation and reflection of such a man are never wasted. It was necessary for the accomplishment of his great work that he should form strong convictions. Such convictions are not formed in a moment ; they are not created by a thrill of enthusiasm ; they are the result of that deep, sustained, and solemn thinking by which we pass into the presence of reason, of conscience, of God, of Eternity. Wesley paused for a time ; then, in the silence of his soul, he heard a voice sending him out to take up his cross, to face his destiny, and to accomplish his mission.

Sunday, April 1, 1739, was one of the most eventful days of Wesley's life. In the morning he accompanied Whitefield to the bowling-green, which was in the Pithay, close to Wine Street. A large assembly had gathered, and Wesley must have been impressed with the spectacle. After the service he and

## 214 The Revival of Religion in England

Whitefield made their way to Hanham. Arriving at Kingswood they probably struck some path that trailed over broken ground and led to the Mount. At that time clusters of colliers' cottages stood among the scrub of the old wood, and black pit-banks rose in the fields. An immense crowd had assembled at the Mount. Whitefield commenced the service with a hymn, and the solemn sound of the singing of the multitude must have touched Wesley's music-loving heart. Then followed the sermon. Delivered with dramatic power, and with an overwhelming force of appeal, it moved the audience as the forest is stirred by rushing winds. With uplifted hands, the benediction was pronounced, and the entranced multitude, with a rustle and a far-spreading murmur, awoke to the light of 'common day.' A little later, Whitefield and Wesley crossed the country to the other side of the wood, and reached Rose Green. On that April day an immense crowd had assembled. Describing the scene Whitefield says—

There were twenty-four coaches, and an exceeding great number of other people, both on foot and horseback. The wind was not so well set to carry the voice as usual ; but, however, I was strengthened to cry aloud and take my last farewell. As I was returning home, many blessed and prayed for me, and wished me a good voyage in the name of the Lord.

Whitefield's day's work was not yet done. Returning to Bristol with Wesley, the two men separated for a

time. We have no record of their conversation on that critical day, but from an incident which occurred that evening we may guess that they once more discussed the question of the necessity and advisability of field-preaching. Whitefield went to the Baldwin Street Religious Society. The 'room' in which the Society met was in a yard to which admission was gained by a narrow entry. The preacher found entry, yard, and room filled by an immense crowd. A ladder was brought, and, climbing over the tiling of an adjoining house, he managed to reach the door of the 'room' and to enter the building. There he spoke his farewell words to a weeping people. The Rev. Henry J. Foster, a keen and careful Methodist antiquary, has discovered a record of a most interesting fact connected with this service. In the 'room' that evening were several young men 'making sport' during the sermon. One of them was named Webb, and afterwards he gave an account of an important announcement that was made by Whitefield at the close of the sermon. He told the audience that the Rev. John Wesley was to preach in 'the brickyard at the farther end of St. Philip's Plain' on the following day.<sup>1</sup> We presume that Whitefield was warranted in making this announcement; if so, the prejudices of John Wesley must have been successfully assailed by the events of the day.

While Whitefield was preaching to the people in Baldwin Street, John Wesley was beginning his work

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. ii. p. 5.



## 216 The Revival of Religion in England

in the Religious Society in Nicholas Street. The Society was small, and we can imagine that with the strong attraction of Whitefield's farewell sermon in the immediate neighbourhood only a little company faced Wesley on that memorable evening. In congenial quietness he began a series of expositions of the Sermon on the Mount. When he began to speak, a fact which had made no special impression upon him before stood out clearly. In his *Journal* he says that the Sermon is 'one pretty remarkable precedent of field-preaching,' adding, 'I suppose there were churches at that time also.' The remark is characteristic of Wesley. He had the Englishman's restlessness in the absence of precedent. Now he had found solid ground on which to march, and with renewed courage he faced the experiences awaiting him on the morrow.

When Wesley and Whitefield met that night at Mrs. Greville's any lingering hesitation on the part of Wesley to take up his friend's work must have vanished. The matter was urgent. Whitefield was leaving the next day, the churches were closed against the evangelists, at Rose Green and Hanham Mount the harvest, ripening in the sunshine, called for the reaper's hand. The work already done had begun to change the moral aspect of an infamous neighbourhood. Was this work to be abandoned because a stiff ecclesiasticism had created a prejudice against it? Wesley's eyes turned towards the mountains of Galilee, and the example of his Master shone before him.

He thought of Him, standing on the hillside, yearning over the people who were scattered like sheep having no shepherd. He saw Him sending out His disciples to preach the gospel of the kingdom, and to gather together the harried and wearied flock. In his evening talk with Whitefield the last film of the prejudice which dimmed his spiritual sight disappeared. He saw clearly. The vision of the English Church, on which he had been inclined, previously, to fix his gaze, faded. It did not altogether vanish; but, above it and beyond it, he saw Christ and the neglected masses of his fellow countrymen. That revelation made him an evangelist whose sphere was the nation.

On Monday, April 2, 1739, at four in the afternoon, Wesley 'submitted to be more vile.' He took his stand on 'a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city.' The Methodist antiquary has searched for many years for this 'little eminence.' At last, through the patient investigation of the Rev. Henry J. Foster, we are able to identify its position. It will be remembered that Whitefield announced in the Baldwin Street 'room' that Wesley would preach on the Monday 'in the brickyard at the farther end of St. Philip's Plain.' We know that this was a spot where Whitefield himself preached. In addition, Wesley, in a letter sent to the Fetter Lane Society, dated April 9, 1739, expressly says that at four in the afternoon he went to a brickyard adjoining to the city where he had an opportunity of preaching the gospel of the kingdom

## 218 The Revival of Religion in England

from a little eminence. Further, the young man named Webb, who heard the announcement in the Baldwin Street 'room,' was present at the service at the brickyard, listened to the preacher, and says, 'It was the first sermon Mr. Wesley preached in the City of Bristol.'<sup>1</sup> Standing upon a 'little eminence' which, according to Mr. Foster, may have been 'the higher end of the ground, the slope of which is slightly toward the river; or, perhaps, a terrace of clay, not yet worked down to the lower level on which his congregation stood,' Wesley faced about three thousand people who had assembled to hear him. He opened his commission as a field-preacher with the text from which his Master once taught His fellow countrymen in the synagogue of Nazareth: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord' (Luke iv. 18, 19). With these words upon his lips, Wesley commenced that bright succession of appeals to the reason, the conscience, and the heart of Englishmen which awoke the churches and changed the spirit of his age.

It is impossible rightly to estimate the consequences of Wesley's action in taking up the work of

<sup>1</sup> See Rev. H. J. Foster's article in the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. ii. pp. 3-8.

field-preaching. By it he discovered the lost people of England. The audiences he gathered were not composed of sedate church-goers, the righteous who 'need no repentance.' A few enthusiastic Churchmen and Churchwomen were there, but the bulk of the listeners represented the crowds that were outside all the churches, the crowds that, at every stage of our history, are in danger of drifting out of the sight of the religious people of this country. The overwhelming majority of Englishmen, in the eighteenth century, had escaped from the direct control of the Christian religion. They stood aloof from the Church, or they were antagonistic to it, or they were indifferent to its existence. They were content that Christians should shut themselves up in their several enclosures, and cease from troubling other people about sin and judgement. They asked to be let alone, and to be allowed, without interference, to find the most pleasant paths to destruction. Wesley and Whitefield felt the agony which rends the heart of a man who is conscious of the frightful lethargy which sometimes creeps over the religious life of a land; they saw it could never be banished by preaching in the churches; and so they took the cross, which, unmoved itself, moves all things, and planted it in the midst of their irreligious countrymen.

There are some who utter a pathetic lament over the exclusion of Whitefield and Wesley from the churches. At this distance of time, with the problem



## 220 The Revival of Religion in England

well worked out, we have no disposition to join in that lament. It was imperative that the evangelists should be thrust into the harvest-fields, and we have no bitter quarrel with the clerical exclusionists who drove them to their work. We may go a step further. It is customary to pour unmitigated blame on the ecclesiastical authorities who made it impossible that Wesley should preach within the comparatively narrow circle of the Church of England; but some obvious facts should be remembered. We have referred to reasons which may have influenced the Bristol clergy in their determination to exclude Whitefield from their pulpits. It is only fair, also, to remember that the doctrines preached by John and Charles Wesley must have appeared new and dangerous to parish ministers who were only slightly acquainted with the authoritative teachings of their own Church. In his *Plain Account of the People called Methodists* John Wesley gives us an insight into the character of the doctrines that stirred the opposition of the clergy, and excited the amazement of the laity in the early years of the Great Revival. He says—

The points we chiefly insisted upon were four. First, that orthodoxy, or right opinions, is, at best, but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all; that neither does religion consist in negatives, in bare harmlessness of any kind; nor merely in externals, in doing good, or using the means of grace, in works of piety (so called) or of charity; that it is nothing short of, or different from, 'the mind that was in Christ'; the

image of God stamped upon the heart ; inward righteousness, attended with the peace of God ; and 'joy in the Holy Ghost.' Secondly, that the only way under heaven to this religion is, to 'repent and believe the gospel'; or (as the Apostle words it), 'repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' Thirdly, that by this faith, 'he that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, is justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ.' And, lastly, that 'being justified by faith,' we taste of the heaven to which we are going ; we are holy and happy ; we tread down sin and fear, and 'sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.'<sup>1</sup>

We can imagine the horror of an eighteenth-century clergyman, when he was informed, for instance, that 'orthodoxy, or right opinions, is at best but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all.' Such teaching cut the ground from under his feet, for his hope of salvation rested on the correctness of his 'opinions.' When he heard this revolutionary doctrine, it is no wonder that his anger blazed out against the teacher, and that he informed him that he should preach in his church no more.

At the present time there is no one who will seriously challenge the truth of Wesley's famous dictum concerning 'orthodoxy, or right opinions.' It is admitted that a man may hold correct religious 'opinions,' that he may be ready to recite the three creeds, that he may assent to all the doctrines of religion, and yet that his 'orthodoxy' may begin and

<sup>1</sup> *Wesley's Works*, vol. viii. p. 249 (third edit.).

## 222 The Revival of Religion in England

end in his mind, leaving his heart and his conduct untouched. That a man's life cannot be wrong so long as his creed is right is an exploded fallacy, and Wesley did much to destroy it. But it must be remembered that in his day this obvious fact concerning 'right opinions' was not understood; and therefore orthodox precisians were scandalized by his assertions.

In mitigation of the severe sentence which is now universally pronounced on the men who excluded Wesley from the churches, we must once more emphasize the fact of the extraordinary ignorance of church doctrine which prevailed among the clergy and laity of the eighteenth century. We have shown from the *Book of Homilies* that the Church of England teaches that we obtain remission of our sins 'freely, without works, by faith only.'<sup>1</sup> If we consider Wesley's 'four points,' we shall find that they harmonize with that declaration. As to his statement concerning 'orthodoxy or right opinions,' it is only a re-affirmation of the teaching of the 'Sermon of Salvation' in the *Book of Homilies*. After showing that the devils believe the 'articles of our faith and all things that be written in the New and Old Testament,' but that they lack 'the very true Christian faith,' the 'Sermon' proceeds—

For the right and true Christian faith is, not only to believe that Holy Scripture and all the foresaid articles of

<sup>1</sup> *Book of Homilies and Canons*, p. 25 (S.P.C.K. edit.).

our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence in God's merciful promises to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ; whereof does follow a loving heart to obey His commandments. And this true Christian faith neither any devil hath, nor yet any man which, in the outward profession of his mouth and in his outward receiving of the Sacraments, in coming to the church and in all other outward appearances, seemeth to be a Christian man, and yet in his living and deeds showeth the contrary. For how can a man have this true faith, this sure trust and confidence in God that by the merits of Christ his sins be forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God, and to be partaker of the kingdom of heaven by Christ, when he liveth ungodly and denieth Christ in his deeds? Surely no such ungodly man can have this faith and trust in God.<sup>1</sup>

Such is the teaching of the Church of England, and such was the doctrine that Wesley preached. But the 'orthodox' clergy and laity of the eighteenth century did not recognize it; and so they shut the churches against the plain-speaking evangelist and turned him into the fields. In after years, when the best of the clergy awoke to the fact that Wesley's doctrine was biblical and in accordance with their own forgotten standards, they did their best to repair their error, and invited him to preach to their congregations. But it was too late. The great step had been taken which led him away from all existing ecclesiastical organizations. He had gone out into the nation, and from it he had gathered a host of men and women

<sup>1</sup> *Book of Homilies and Canons*, pp. 30, 31 (S.P.C.K. edit.).



## 224 The Revival of Religion in England

who listened to the message of salvation with simplicity and eagerness, and accepted it with 'a right and true Christian faith.'

Losing sight for a moment of the men who compelled Whitefield and Wesley to take to the fields, we have only words of commendation for the plan of action which the evangelists adopted. Experience soon dissolved Wesley's prejudices against open-air preaching, and to the end of his days he was an enthusiastic advocate of this method of reaching the masses. On Hanham Mount and at Rose Green he must have watched, with his keen, quiet eyes, the crowds that confronted Whitefield on that memorable Sunday. He felt that at last a man had got at the people who most needed the gospel. The ecclesiastical theorist might argue that there were other methods of reaching them; he saw that, as a matter of fact, this was the only method that had actually reached them. These people were untouched, untroubled, unhardened, by the teaching of the time. Their minds were virgin soil. The theologian had not instructed them in the intricacies and niceties of the Deistical controversy, nor had the ethical sermonizer trained them in his system of morals. There survived in them, notwithstanding all the havoc that sin had made, a conscience that was not dead but sleeping, and that awoke at the thought of God and eternity. They possessed a power to receive and appreciate the strange tidings of the love of God manifested in the death of Christ. Face to face with

these 'outcasts,' Wesley noted that the words of Whitefield, spoken with the directness and simplicity which are essential to effective open-air preaching, captured and profoundly moved his hearers. The gloom and the gleam, answering to the changing April weather, were on their faces. Tears were there, and so was the sunshine that told of the consciousness of sins forgiven. Wesley caught the significance of the spectacle. He learned that the knowledge of pardon that came to him in an obscure room in London could come to colliers, villagers, townsfolk, and citizens on the hillside and in the green meadows, and in that moment of insight he discovered the secret of the regeneration of England.

We must now note an important event in the life of Whitefield. After introducing Wesley to his work in Bristol, he went on an evangelizing tour in Wales, his travelling companions being William Seward and Howell Harris. With them, on April 25, 1739, he journeyed to London, where, save for one or two brief excursions made to other places, he continued until the end of June. He found that the churches were all closed against him. It is true that the Rev. George Stonehouse, the vicar of Islington, would have welcomed him, but the churchwardens insisted that, inasmuch as he had not a licence, he had no right to preach in the church. The churchwardens were sturdy opponents of the new evangelists. In an article by Mr. E. Crawshaw, in the *Proceedings of the Wesley*

## 226 The Revival of Religion in England

*Historical Society*,<sup>1</sup> there are several interesting and important extracts from the Minutes of the Islington Vestry, which cast light upon the events of this period. The Vestry met on April 29, 1739, and the following resolutions were passed—

Resolved, that it appears that the Rev. Mr. Stonehouse is the real occasion of the frequent disturbances in this church and churchyard, by his introducing strangers to preach in this church, particularly Mr. Charles Wesley, Mr. Whitfield (*sic*), and other unlicensed persons, by encouraging and promising to stand by and indemnify them in their preaching, without producing their licences as the canon directs. Resolved, that it be referred to the churchwardens and others, or any five of them, to draw up a presentment to be exhibited by the churchwardens to the Bishop of London, or his surrogate, at the next visitation, relative to the aforesaid facts.

A week having passed, the Vestry met again on May 6, 1739, and the following minutes were entered in the book—

It having been agreed to refer all matters in difference between Mr. Stonehouse and this parish to ten gentlemen of the said parish, five of whom were nominated by Mr. S. and five by the parish, it has been concluded by the said ten gentlemen that the Rev. Mr. Stonehouse shall absolutely refuse the granting of his pulpit to Mr. John Wesley, Mr. Charles Wesley, and Mr. George Whitfield (*sic*), and that those gentlemen shall not officiate any more for him in the parish church or churchyard in any part of the duty whatsoever.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. v. pp. 238, 239.

This agreement Mr. Stonehouse ratified and confirmed by his signature : and, the quarrel being ended, it was ordered that the committee appointed to draw up a presentment should be discharged.

It will be remembered that the Chancellor of the Diocese of Bristol, when he informed Whitefield that he was not to preach in the churches, told him that he spoke 'in the name of the clergy and laity of the city of Bristol.' That fact, and the minutes of the Islington Vestry, show that the opposition to the evangelists was not exclusively clerical. In the Islington case a friendly clergyman found himself helpless in the presence of the laymen of his church. They determined that the evangelists should not preach in the pulpit, or in the churchyard, and, although with great reluctance, Mr. Stonehouse had to yield to their will.

Being shut out of the churches, Whitefield fell back on his Bristol experiences, and resolved to preach in the open air. He sought out a place where he might set up his field-pulpit, and make his appeal to the neglected myriads of London. His choice was excellent. It is difficult to imagine the condition of Finsbury when Whitefield fixed upon it as the scene of his preaching. It may serve to carry us back into the vanished past if we remember that the City Road was not completed and opened for traffic until more than twenty years after the events we are recording. Where Finsbury Square now stands there was an open space, known as the Upper Moorfields. From its south side



## 228 The Revival of Religion in England

to the present South Place and Eldon Street stretched the Middle Moorfields; and from South Place to the City Wall, and from Broad Street to Finsbury Pavement, there spread another great space of ground, known as the Lower Moorfields.<sup>1</sup> The Upper and Middle Moorfields were encircled by trees. The Lower Moorfields were divided into four squares by strong but clumsy wooden rails. Each square contained a large grass-plot, surrounded by trees. Between these squares, called the 'quarters,' were gravel walks. One of them, which extended from east to west, and was adorned with an avenue of trees, was known as 'the City Mall,' and it was generally thronged on Sunday, at noon and in the evening, by a multitude of the citizens.<sup>2</sup>

In the Moorfields Whitefield saw that he could preach to the 'well-dressed' citizens of London, but he was anxious also to reach the mob. He effected this part of his purpose by selecting Kennington Common as a strategic point. Kennington Common at that time was a vast tract of land which lay about a mile beyond Newington, then a small hamlet. Gardens spread between the Common and Westminster Bridge. This open country is described by Sydney as the resort of the 'riff-raffs' of London. Kennington Common itself was the place where hundreds of condemned felons

<sup>1</sup> Sydney's *England and the English in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. i. p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

had been hanged and gibbeted. The neighbourhood had a bad reputation, vicious men and women infested it, and it was the scene of constant violence. In the eyes of the field-preacher it was irresistibly attractive.

On Sunday, April 29, 1739, Whitefield preached in the Lower Moorfields to 'an exceeding great multitude,' and at five o'clock he took his stand on Kennington Common. The news of his coming must have been spread abroad, for he tells us that thirty thousand people were supposed to be present. We do not know his system of enumeration. This estimate may be exaggerated; but, undoubtedly, both at Moorfields and the Common, immense audiences gathered together on that day to hear the gospel from his lips. In his description of the evening service we get a glimpse of the field-preaching of the day. He says—

The wind carried my voice to the extremest part of the audience. All stood attentive, and joined in the psalm and the Lord's Prayer most regularly. I scarce ever preached more quietly in any church. The word came with power. The people were much affected. All agreed that it was never seen on this wise before. I hope a good inroad has been made into the devil's kingdom this day.

During his stay in London, the Moorfields and Kennington Common were his principal places for field-preaching, and there he entreated thousands of men and women to be reconciled to God.

Whitefield's work in London attracted wide attention. The interest in his preaching was much

## 230 The Revival of Religion in England

quickened by the hostile criticism of the clergy, who attacked him savagely, warned their congregations against him, and, as a consequence, made people curious to hear him. The criticism was not wholly clerical. Dr. Johnson's opinion of Whitefield seems to have been formed at this time. Subsequently he expressed it in the following words—

Whitefield's popularity is chiefly owing to the peculiarity of his manner. He would be followed by crowds, were he to wear a night-cap in the pulpit, or were he to preach from a tree. He never drew as much attention as a mountebank does; he did not draw attention by doing better than others, but by doing what was strange. Were Astley to preach a sermon standing upon his head on a horse's back, he would collect a multitude to hear him; but no wise man would say he made a better sermon for that. I never treated Whitefield's ministry with contempt. I believe he did good. He devoted himself to the lower classes of mankind, and among them he was of use. But when familiarity and noise claim the praise due to knowledge, art, and elegance, we must beat down such pretensions.

There can be no doubt that Dr. Johnson's 'appreciation' of Whitefield represents the opinion concerning him current in the literary circles of the time. It does not surprise us that the young evangelist was keenly attacked in the journals of the day.

While there may be a little truth in Dr. Johnson's opinion that Whitefield's popularity was due to 'the peculiarity of his manner,' it is impossible to accept his explanation of the secret of the preacher's success.

Tyerman, in his *Life of Whitefield*, comes nearer the mark. He attributes his success to the facts that he was a natural orator of the highest order, and that the truths he preached were exactly adapted to the wants and yearnings of human nature. He points out that, speaking generally, these truths had been forgotten, and were not preached in the churches and chapels of England. But there was another fact, which Tyerman mentions, and which we think is the right explanation of the wonderful scenes of the Evangelical Revival. In answer to the prayers of the best men in the country, the Holy Spirit was moving the masses of the people, and making them intensely anxious for personal salvation. The preaching of Whitefield was accompanied by 'power from on high,' and the scenes witnessed in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were reproduced in England. This is the only explanation that meets all the facts of the case.

When Whitefield was in London, he received news of 'the wonderful success of John Wesley in Bristol.' We have noted the influence of Whitefield on Wesley at the commencement of the Great Revival. That influence was definite, strong, and decisive. We must now turn aside from following the career of Whitefield, and fasten our attention more particularly on John Wesley. We left him in Bristol, after his first service in the brickyard. It is necessary that we should return to the West of England if we would study the progress of the Great Revival.



## 232 The Revival of Religion in England

After his preliminary experiment in the brick-yard, Wesley took up the work of field-preaching with zest. He preached at the places where Whitefield had taken his stand in the neighbourhood of Bristol, and he struck out further afield. By the light of a letter which has been published in the *Moravian Messenger*<sup>1</sup> we see him journeying to Bath. He preached there at five o'clock 'in a meadow on the side of the hill close to the town.' He says, 'they could see us from Lady Cox's in the square plainly.' He offered 'God's free grace' to about two thousand souls. Again, at eight o'clock, he stood on some steps at the end of a house in Gracious Street, and preached 'remission of sins to many casual hearers.' In the crowd we notice with peculiar pleasure Griffith Jones, whose eyes must have kindled at the sight of Wesley. At the close of the service, Wesley and Griffith Jones met, and, spending about an hour together, were refreshed with each other's company. The next day, at ten o'clock, Wesley preached once more in the meadow to about two thousand five hundred people. Then he rode back to Bristol and resumed his work in that city.

The work of Wesley in Bristol was not confined to open-air preaching. His connexion with the Religious Societies was fruitful of striking results. It will be remembered that James Hutton was dissatisfied with the spiritual condition of many of the members of

<sup>1</sup> 1877, p. 95.

these Societies. In his estimation, not a few of them failed to rise above a rather low level of the Christian life. Hutton's dissatisfaction led him to found new Societies, in which, in addition to the means usually employed, he adopted and adapted certain arrangements which existed among the Moravians. Wesley assisted Hutton in the remodelling of these Societies, and carried with him into the West the new ideas which had proved serviceable in London. He was not a man who could be satisfied with preaching to a huge crowd of unrecognizable strangers. He could not be satisfied until he had individualized them. He was compelled, by his instincts and convictions, to keep in touch with those who were influenced by his ministry, and to train them in the doctrines and duties of the religion to which so many of them were suddenly introduced. No man saw more clearly that the consciousness of the remission of sins is only a primary experience of the Christian life. He knew that such consciousness was sometimes dulled, and eventually lost; that a man has to fight hard against temptation, and that he is helped to win the battle if he fights it in association with sympathetic comrades. We notice that, on the Wednesday following the Monday service in the brickyard, he formed a little 'band,' consisting of three women, who agreed to meet together weekly in order 'to confess their faults one to another, and pray one for another, that they may be healed.' The same evening four young men agreed

## 234 The Revival of Religion in England

to meet 'in pursuance of the same design.' The three women were Mrs. Norman, Mrs. Greville, and Mrs. Panon. The four young men were Samuel Wathen, surgeon; Richard Cross, upholsterer; Charles Bonner, distiller; and Thomas Westell, carpenter.<sup>1</sup> On Tuesday, April 17, 1739, eleven unmarried women met at Mrs. Greville's, and desired that three others might be admitted among them. They were then divided into three 'bands.' Wesley had now an object-lesson from which the other members of the Religious Societies might learn, and that fact made him proceed with his work with greater hopefulness. In the various places where the Religious Societies met, he preached and taught assiduously. His doctrine of the forgiveness of sins was as strange to some of the members of these Societies as to the colliers of Kingswood. But with irresistible logic, and with unanswerable appeals to Scripture and his own experience, he drove home the truth. It was understood and accepted. Sometimes the revelation of the possibility of personal pardon came as quietly as the dawn; at others, it lit up the soul as with a lightning flash. In some cases, when men and women were convinced of sin and groaned beneath its 'intolerable' burden, they shuddered in the presence of 'the wrath to come.' Then, when they saw Christ upon the cross, and their burden rolled away, their rapture was boundless. The 'scenes' which occurred in the rooms of the

<sup>1</sup> *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1877, p. 512.

Religious Societies were often strange and bewildering. Overwrought people fell into strong convulsions, and acted as if they were the subjects of demoniacal possession. Their fierce excitement was followed by profound peace, and a clear and joyous understanding of the mercy of God as manifested in Christ their Saviour. These 'scenes' scandalized some of the on-lookers. They provoked keen public criticism at the time, and they still form a stock objection to the work of John Wesley. Greatly daring, the critic sometimes asserts that these 'scenes' justified the hostility of the clergy to the evangelists, and were the reason why the churches were closed against them. This ingenious theory cannot bear the test of the almanack. The churches were closed against Whitefield and Wesley before any of the 'scenes' took place in the Bristol 'rooms.' To a man who knows nothing of the impetuous running of the tides of emotion at a time of religious revival, the 'scenes' remain to this hour unexplained. But those who have felt the pentecostal stroke of conviction, and the ecstasy that follows pardon, can understand, to some extent, the remarkable events which startled and repelled the ordinary observer at the outset of the Great Revival. John Wesley, whose sympathy made him patient with much that was unusual in religious experience, noted these cases, and records them in plain and unexcited words. He did more. He watched the persons who were so violently affected, and he was



## 236 The Revival of Religion in England

not content unless their extraordinary agitation was followed by moral reform. When he saw a man walking in the way of holiness who had been a drunkard and a blasphemer, a sinner unclean in heart and lips and life, he was not inclined to doubt the reality of the exceptional experience through which he had entered into the kingdom of God.

Undeterred by public and private criticism of the 'scenes' which perplexed and scandalized some of the sober-minded members of the Religious Societies, Wesley went on with his work. He preached the doctrine of Salvation by Faith with remarkable success. The pages of his *Journal* shine with the records of the experience of those who rejoiced in the pardon of their sins. The Society rooms were crowded, and at last it became necessary to provide accommodation for those who flocked to the services. A piece of ground near St. James's Churchyard, in the Horsefair, was secured, and upon it a room was built 'large enough to contain both the Societies of Nicholas and Baldwin Street, and such of their acquaintances as might desire to be present with them, at such times as the Scripture was expounded.' The foundation-stone of the new building was laid on Saturday, May 9, 1739, and the new 'room' began to be erected. Before it was ready for occupation, events occurred which made it impossible for Wesley to continue his services in Baldwin Street. On Sunday, June 3, 1739, after preaching to eight or nine thousand people at Rose Green, in the

evening he went to Bristol and held a service in the shell of the new Society room. Across the years we can hear the people singing—

Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!  
Thine own immortal strength put on.

Wesley expounded the text, 'Marvel not if the world hate you,' and so with prayer and song and preaching the building was dedicated to God. Wesley did not perceive the significance of the step he had taken, but there can be no doubt that the erection of the 'New Room' in Bristol was one of the most decisive acts of his life.

It was necessary that Wesley should leave Bristol for a time and visit London, in order that he might assist in composing disputes that had arisen in the Fetter Lane Society. Riding along the roads and country lanes, he had an opportunity of thinking over the events which had occurred during his stay in the West. Those events found their true perspective, and stood out clearly. In his *Journal* he records the results of his reflections. He confesses that while in Bristol he had been perplexed concerning his own proceedings. But after much prayer and thought, and full consideration of all the objections which had been made against the course he had taken, he was satisfied that he had done right. To a man of his habit of mind 'irregularity' was distasteful. He did not affect to deny that his proceedings were not in accordance with the

## 238 The Revival of Religion in England

discipline of the Church of England. If he had been unconscious of the fact, his friends saw it, and would have made him see it clearly. In their letters they expostulated with him. One of them told him that it was difficult to justify, on Catholic principles, the assembling of Christians who were none of his charge, to sing psalms, pray, and hear the Scriptures expounded. Wesley felt the force of the objection. After weighing it in the well-poised scales of his judgement, he reached a conclusion which he expressed in memorable words—

I look upon all the world as my parish ; thus far, I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to ; and sure I am, that His blessing attends it.<sup>1</sup>

During his journey from Bristol his mind laid hold upon this principle with a firmer grasp. Convinced that he was carrying out the designs of God, he rode on to London.

Wesley's time in London was much occupied by attempts to settle the disputes that had arisen in the Fetter Lane Society. Fortunately he found more congenial work to do. He went with Whitefield to Blackheath, where twelve or fourteen thousand people were assembled. At Whitefield's request he preached in his stead. He tells us that he was greatly moved

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. i. pp. 201, 202.

with compassion for the rich that were there, and that he applied a part of his sermon to them. 'Some of them seemed to attend, while others drove away in their coaches from so uncouth a preacher.' On Sunday, June 17, 1739, he preached in the Upper Moorfields to a congregation numbering nearly seven thousand, and on Kennington Common to a huge crowd of about fifteen thousand persons. His invariable message was salvation through Christ. In addition to preaching in the open air he exhorted in other places. It is a significant fact that at Wapping some of his hearers were affected by the physical prostrations that had occurred in connexion with his services in Bristol.

On Monday, June 18, 1739, Wesley returned to Bristol, and preached to a numerous congregation. Our eye rests with special pleasure on one of his hearers, Howell Harris. For some reason Harris had conceived a prejudice against Wesley, and he had been much dissuaded from either hearing or seeing him by many who said 'all manner of evil' about him. But when Wesley preached from his Kennington Common text, 'Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,' Harris's prejudice disappeared. In an interview that followed the service all misunderstandings vanished, and the two evangelists clasped hands as comrades in the great campaign.

When Wesley returned to Bristol he took up another building scheme which had far-reaching consequences. Whitefield, when he rode away on



## 240 The Revival of Religion in England

Monday, April 2, 1739, paused for a while at Kingswood. He had been stirred in heart by the spectacle of the neglected children of the colliers, who were growing up in ignorance among the black heaps of the forest. We have seen that no school existed in the wood, and Whitefield determined that the want should be supplied. He was much attracted by the scheme of 'Circulating Schools' projected and worked by Griffith Jones in Wales, and the success of the scheme kindled his desire to build a school in Kingswood. Negotiations were entered into for the acquisition of land, a site was given him, and, on April 2, the foundation-stone was laid. Whitefield knelt upon it and prayed, then he went on his way, and left the task of erecting the school to others. Towards the end of June Wesley took up the work and commenced building. On Tuesday, June 26, he tells us that he preached near the house which, a few days before, had begun to be built as a school. He stood under 'a little sycamore-tree' during a violent storm of rain. The school was in the middle of Kingswood; and, when it was finished, it became the centre, not only of educational, but also of evangelistic, work.

It will be remembered that a school had been previously established in the Baldwin Street Society Room. It is also interesting to note that provision for the teaching of children was made in the new room in the Horsefair. In the policy of insurance effected with the Bristol Crown Fire Office, and dated May 16, 1740,

the Horsefair property is described as 'a dwelling-house, school, and Society room, all under one roof,' and 'another small schoolroom adjoining thereto.' The room seems to have been a long building containing, first of all, a Society room in which were forms and a desk 'with a piece of green cloth nailed to it'; and lighted by 'two sconces for eight candles each in the middle.' Then came the school; and near it was the dwelling-house where John and Charles Wesley lived during their visits to Bristol. The dwelling-house consisted of a little room where Wesley spoke to the persons who came to him, and a garret in which he slept. There was also a second school, which, perhaps, was formed by a 'lean-to' against the main building. The school in Bristol was of importance. At first four masters and a mistress were employed in it; but under the pinch of poverty the staff had to be reduced.

The creation of schools in Bristol and Kingswood shows that from the outset Wesley saw that his work as an evangelist needed to be supplemented. He was not only called to preach, but also to teach. At Oxford he had gathered poor children into the schools and had taught them to read; in Georgia he had been a schoolmaster; and, when he began to preach the gospel in England, some of his earliest thoughts were directed to the problem of education. His aim was to 'unite the pair so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety,' and his success in achieving his purpose entitles him to

## 242 The Revival of Religion in England

be placed among the pioneers of popular education in this country.

The 'Room' in Bristol and the school in Kingswood brought great financial burdens on Wesley; but the load was speedily increased. On August 31, 1739, he returned to London and remained there for a month. He preached to great multitudes in Moorfields and on Kennington Common, and visited several Religious Societies. After another excursion to the West we find him again in London, where, on Sunday, November 11, 1739, he preached at eight o'clock in the morning to five or six thousand people in Moorfields, and in the evening to seven or eight thousand 'in the place which had been the King's foundery for cannon.' It was 'a vast, uncouth heap of ruins.' Wesley was pressed to take the place into his own hands and use it as a preaching-house. He did so. The purchase and adaptation of the building cost £800; and for some years this heavy debt gave him grave anxiety. When he bought the Foundery it had been a wreck for more than twenty years. In 1716, while recasting guns taken from the French in Marlborough's campaign, a terrible explosion blew off the roof, shook the building, killed several of the workmen, and injured others. The place was abandoned by the Government, and the Royal Foundery was removed to Woolwich. When the old Foundery was first opened, Silas Told, the prisoners' friend, informs us that it was 'a ruinous place with an old pantile

covering,' and that it consisted of decayed timbers, the pulpit being made of 'a few rough boards.' Wesley spent money upon it, and transformed it into a serviceable building. Tyerman, speaking of it, says—

It stood in the locality called 'Windmill Hill,' now known by the name of Windmill Street. The building was placed on the east side of the street, some sixteen or eighteen yards from Providence Row, and measured about forty yards in front, from north to south, and about thirty-three yards in depth, from east to west. There were two front doors, one leading to the chapel, and the other to the preacher's house, school, and band-room. The chapel, which would accommodate some fifteen hundred people, was without pews, but, on the ground floor, immediately before the pulpit, were about a dozen seats with back rails, appropriated to female worshippers. Under the front gallery were the free seats for women; and under the side galleries the free seats for men. The front gallery was used exclusively by females, and the side galleries by males. The band-room was behind the chapel, on the ground floor, some eighty feet long and twenty feet wide, and accommodated about three hundred persons. Here the classes met; here, in winter, the five o'clock morning service was conducted; and here were held, at two o'clock, on Wednesdays and Fridays, weekly meetings for prayer and intercession. The north end of the room was used for a school, and was fitted up with desks; and at the south end was the book-room for the sale of Wesley's publications. Over the band-room were apartments for Wesley, in which his mother died; and at the end of the chapel was a dwelling-house for his domestics and assistant preachers, while attached to the whole was a small building used as a coach-house and stable.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Wesley*, vol. i. pp. 271, 272.



## 244 The Revival of Religion in England

Wesley's connexion with the Fetter Lane Society was terminated in July, 1740. On the 23rd of that month twenty-five men and fifty women assembled at the Foundery, and were constituted into a Society. It will, therefore, be seen that in Bristol, Kingswood, and London permanent provision was made for the accommodation of the people who were under Wesley's special pastoral care.

In addition to London, Bristol, and Kingswood, Wesley had another principal centre of work. He was much encouraged with the result of his preaching among the Kingswood colliers. Eight months after he began his work among them he could say—

The scene is already changed. Kingswood does not now, as a year ago, resound with cursing and blasphemy. It is no more filled with drunkenness and uncleanness, and the idle diversions that naturally lead thereto. It is no longer full of wars and fightings, of clamour and bitterness, of wrath and envyings. Peace and love are there. Great numbers of the people are mild, gentle, and easy to be entreated. They do not cry, neither strive, and rarely is their voice heard in the streets, or indeed in their own wood, unless when they are at their usual evening diversion—singing praise unto God their Saviour.

The change is beautifully depicted in Charles Wesley's hymn for the Kingswood colliers—

The people that in darkness lay,  
In sin and error's deadly shade,  
Have seen a glorious gospel day,  
In Jesu's lovely face displayed.

(HYMN 366, *Methodist Hymn-Book*.)

Delighted with the manifestation of the power of the gospel in the case of the Kingswood colliers, it was borne in on Wesley's mind that if he preached the same doctrine to colliers elsewhere they would respond to the message. In the spring of 1742, having gone on an evangelizing tour, he reached Birstall, in Yorkshire. Then he determined to ride further north. On Friday, May 28, accompanied by his travelling companion, John Taylor, he arrived in Newcastle-on-Tyne, and found a lodging in a small inn that stood on the Gateshead side of the old bridge. His picture of the moral condition of Newcastle is striking: 'So much drunkenness, cursing and swearing, even from the mouths of little children, do I never remember to have seen and heard before.' He was roused to action. 'Surely,' he says, 'this place is ripe for Him who came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.' On Sunday morning, at seven o'clock, he and his companion went to Sandgate, 'the poorest and most contemptible part of the town.' Standing there they sang the hundredth psalm. A few people drew near, staring at the strange sight. Then a crowd numbering about four or five hundred persons collected. Wesley, opening his Bible, began to preach. His text was: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.' As the 'good news' was proclaimed many other persons were attracted, until

## 246 The Revival of Religion in England

about fifteen hundred had congregated. The service closed, but the people lingered, gaping and staring in profound astonishment. Then the preacher said, 'If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach again.' At the hour appointed a great multitude gathered together, and once more the glad tidings of salvation were proclaimed. The people, with loving importunity, pressed around him, and entreated him to stay with them, but he had promised to be in Birstall on Tuesday night, and was obliged to mount and ride away. It is interesting to note that some of those who heard Wesley were members of a 'Religious Society' which existed in Newcastle. According to their own testimony they had gone on 'in a prudent, regular manner, and were well spoken of by all men.' Wesley's visit opened their eyes to a higher form of the Christian life.

Although Wesley was obliged to leave, he seems to have been so much impressed with Newcastle that he arranged that Charles Wesley should take his place. Charles Wesley's preaching met with great success. When John Wesley returned to the town on November 13, 1742, he found that a large number of persons had been gathered together into a Society. During his visit the number increased to upwards of eight hundred. In addition, many in the neighbouring towns, villages, and lone houses within ten or twelve miles of Newcastle entered into the experience of the forgiveness of their

sins through faith in Jesus Christ. Wesley was concerned when he faced 'the wild, staring, loving Society.' He could not be content until he had spoken to all of the members, and examined them as to their religious experience. He was not satisfied with the result of his conversation, and so he preached to them with great plainness the doctrines of salvation. His sermons told, and many who had been walking in the twilight passed into the radiance of an unclouded sun.

During his second visit to Newcastle-on-Tyne Wesley purchased a piece of land outside the Pilgrim Street Gate. On Monday, December 20, 1742, the first stone of the 'House' was laid, and the building went on to completion. On Friday, March 25, 1743, Wesley preached 'in the shell,' and afterwards held a watch-night there. In many respects the Newcastle 'House' answered to the description we have already given of the Bristol Room and of the Foundery. Dr. Stamp, in *The Orphan-House of Wesley*, says—

The lower part of the House was the chapel, fitted up with pulpit and forms, the men and women sitting apart. Above the chapel was a large compartment lighted from behind, the centre of which was used as a band-room; opening from which, on either side, were several class-rooms for the use of the Society. On the highest story, a kind of Scotch 'flat,' were suites of apartments, subsequently appropriated for the residence of the preachers and their families; while on the roof was a wooden erection, about eleven feet square, with tiled covering, generally known as 'Mr. Wesley's study.' A narrow staircase, little more than



## 248 The Revival of Religion in England

two feet wide, led from the preacher's dwelling below, to a small floor in the actual roof of the building, opening from which was the doorway to the study. This apartment, even in the tidiest days of the Orphan House, must have been of the most homely description. Its exposure to the wintry blasts would also render it an undesirable retreat for any to whom warmth and comfort were matters of moment.<sup>1</sup>

In the Trust Deed, which is dated March 5, 1745, we notice that it was provided that a school was to be kept up in the building, to consist of one master and one mistress, and such forty poor children as the Wesleys, and, after their death, the trustees, might select.

It will be seen that the work of Wesley speedily assumed a shape which indicated that it was not to be a passing incident in the religious life of England. The preaching-houses in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle-on-Tyne meant that his work was to abide. It is scarcely necessary to say that these 'houses' were independent of the control of the bishops of the Church of England. They were not erected with their permission, nor had they anything to do with their management. Anglican writers, watching Wesley's work with illuminated eyes, detect the moment when he commenced that departure from the Church of England which resulted in the creation of an independent ecclesiastical organization. They point to 'rooms' in Bristol, London, and Newcastle-on-Tyne,

<sup>1</sup> p. 16.

and tell us that in them we may see the signs which mark the parting of the ways.

The 'preaching-houses' stood as evidences of the permanence of Wesley's work, and that in both its branches. The services held in them were not intended to be substitutes for field-preaching. They were built to contain the people who, having been influenced by the preaching in the open air, needed special instruction in the great doctrines of salvation. They were also erected in order that such persons might enjoy a religious fellowship, such as could not be obtained in any other place. In addition, Wesley knew that, if his work was to last 'beyond the age of a man,' he must influence the children, and so he connected schools with his preaching-houses. He also made them centres of philanthropic work; for he insisted that care for 'the bodies of men' is an imperative duty imposed on Christian men.

If we keep our eyes on these centres of evangelistic work, we shall find that incidents which occurred in them profoundly influenced the course of the Great Revival.

If we turn our attention for a few moments to Kingswood, we shall see there, on June 12, 1739, a congregation gathered together near the sycamore-tree that has become famous in Methodist history. In that congregation stands a young man, who, on the preceding day, has walked from Reading. Wesley knows him, and, indeed, has asked him to come to Kingswood to

## 250 The Revival of Religion in England

take charge of the school then being built for the colliers' children. The people are disappointed, for the young man who was to have read a sermon to them has not arrived. They look round anxiously, and at last some of them appeal to the stranger from Reading, and ask him to preach. Reluctantly he consents. Describing the effect of the sermon afterwards, he says: 'The Lord bore witness with my words, insomuch that many believed in that hour.' He preaches again on the next day, and twice on the following Sunday. Wesley was absent from Bristol at the time, but returned on June 18. Preaching in the 'room,' as we have already stated, he met with Howell Harris, and had a long interview with him. He thus had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with a lay preacher whose work had been signally owned of God. Any prejudice that he might have entertained against the preaching of laymen would be severely assailed by the talk which he had with the enthusiastic and successful evangelist of Wales. When the young man who had preached at Kingswood saw Wesley, he reported to him his proceedings. Some persons objected to his preaching, and these also came and urged Wesley to forbid him. But he declined to interfere. Instead of stopping him, he encouraged him in his work. 'Thus encouraged,' says Tyerman, 'he preached constantly in Kingswood and the neighbouring villages for the next eighteen months, and sometimes supplied Wesley's place in Bristol, when he was absent preaching in other towns.' His name was

John Cennick, and we are inclined to accept the suggestion that he was the first lay preacher definitely and regularly employed by Wesley. It is true that Wesley says that Joseph Humphreys was the first lay preacher who assisted him in England in 1738, but the reference is so obscure that it is impossible to found anything upon it. As to the well-known story of Thomas Maxfield, whose care for the Society in the Foundery led to his becoming a preacher, it must be remembered that he was not converted until May, 1739, and that the incident described so graphically by Whitehead and Moore did not take place until more than a year after Cennick had commenced preaching in Kingswood and the neighbourhood. The importance of the step Wesley took when he availed himself of the work of the lay preachers cannot be exaggerated. Without their aid he would never have accomplished the evangelization of England.

If we have to go to Kingswood for the initiation of lay preaching, we must direct our attention to Bristol in order that we may watch the beginning of another most important arrangement by which Wesley carried on his work. Wesley's mind was much exercised by the success of his preaching. He was not elated by it. The sense of responsibility was strong in him, and it was impossible for him to be content with the results of his field-preaching, or even with the swift accumulation of members in his Societies. He could not rest until he obtained an exact knowledge



## 252 The Revival of Religion in England

of the spiritual condition and the moral character of those who placed themselves under his care. A man with such tendencies would be apt to concentrate his attention on particular places and people. But Wesley was destined to lead a wandering life. He had to multiply his centres, and to give himself up to the evangelizing of the nation. It was fortunate that in the 'room' in the Horsefair, which subsequently gave place to the chapel which now stands on the old site, an idea came quite unexpectedly, which relieved Wesley's conscience, and placed in his hands an efficient method of shepherding his people. The well-known arrangement by which Societies were divided into 'classes' under the care of 'leaders,' resulted in a system not only beneficial to the members, but also absolutely essential to Wesley if he was to be set free to roam over the whole country. It will therefore be seen that difficulties befriended Wesley at the outset of his career. They provided him with great opportunities. His inability to overtake the work of preaching led to the employment of lay evangelists; and the difficulty of exercising close pastoral oversight over his Societies caused him to employ class-leaders. The work of the latter was complementary to that of the preachers, and its success is one of the most remarkable facts in modern Church history. Wesley was a great captain of spiritual industry. His skill in finding work for unemployed Christians was remarkable, and it determined his success. He insisted that men and

women were not converted for themselves. He fought the self-centring instinct in human nature, and did much to modify it. Work awaited a man as soon as the new life possessed him. He had to go to his neighbours, and tell them the great things God had done for him. But the supreme workers were the preachers and the class-leaders. To the former he spoke the stirring words, 'You have nothing to do but to save souls'; to the latter he gave constant counsels, which convinced them that they must give themselves up to the guiding and feeding of the people who had been sought and saved.

Let us now turn to Newcastle-on-Tyne, in order that we may watch the beginning of another elemental force in Wesley's work. Some of the Religious Societies possessed rules by which their proceedings were governed. When Wesley was associated with the Society in Fetter Lane he assisted in the work of drawing up a set of rules for that Society, and especially for its 'Bands.' We are not surprised, therefore, to find him, during his visit to Newcastle-on-Tyne in February, 1743, busy in his airy study drawing up a document which had not only a strong influence on the religious and moral character of the members of his Societies, but also served to knit them into a remarkable unity. That document, which bears the date February 22, 1743, was the well-known 'Rules of the Society'; and from that hour it became an indispensable instrument in his hands. The title of 'The Rules' indicates a

## 254 The Revival of Religion in England

special feature of his Societies. The Religious Societies were scattered about the country without any marked dependence on each other. In some of the towns they were associated together for common work ; but, as we have seen, they sprang up sometimes as separate units, and were dominated by individuals. But Wesley, in his title to the Rules, speaks of the ' United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.' From the first, the Methodist people were one, and through the years of their history that fact has ministered to their growing strength.

Wesley, in pursuing his work, had no previously arranged scheme of organization. He was, in the best sense of the word, an opportunist. But, as we follow his course we see that he was led to adopt the wisest measures for promoting his evangelistic campaign. During the first four years of his work the guiding principles of his mission were settled. He had discovered the doctrines which had in them the power of religious, moral, and social reform ; he had tested them on all sorts and conditions of men ; he had followed his conscience, although it led him away from a Church which he honoured and loved ; he had found the people ; he had called to his side as fellow workers the unemployed laity of England ; he had learned that religion is nothing when divorced from morality ; he had restored the practice of fellowship in the Christian Church ; he had accomplished the difficult task of bringing into a warm-hearted brotherhood people who

had never seen each other, and who were isolated by dreary roads and seemingly interminable distances. Having found out the methods by which England could be evangelized, he gave himself up to his task, and did not lay it down until touched by the hand of death.

Being relieved of much of the burden of the task of watching and feeding his Societies, John Wesley gave himself up to the work of evangelizing the towns and villages of England. He entered upon that extraordinary itinerant career that finds its freshest and fullest expression in his *Journals*. When we remember the condition of the country, the difficulty of travelling, the hardships incident to his wandering life, we read the story of his work with an ever-increasing wonder. How any man could have borne the physical fatigue which he endured is a problem still unsolved. It perplexed his contemporaries. He thought that he knew the reasons for his extraordinary capacity for toil, but those he cites do not explain the whole case. There is no satisfactory explanation that omits the divine intention and presence in his life and work. He was strong because he was carrying out a divine programme. Watching the times in which he lived, following his unhesitating, unrelenting progress, scrutinizing the results of his lavish labours, we can only accept the explanation that comforted him when life and strength were ebbing away. Turning to his old comrades gathered around his death-bed, he joyfully said, 'The best of all is, God is with us.' The



## 256 The Revival of Religion in England

secret of his work and its success is revealed by those memorable words.

Let us not quit the standpoint we have reached—‘The best of all is, God is with us.’ There is a philosophy of history that is vain. If we were to accept its teaching we should be tempted to believe that great reformations of religion invariably arise out of the conditions of the life of the nation in which they occur; that, after all, a revival of religion is an incident in a natural process of events. No eye is sufficiently keen to discover in the England of the eighteenth century the streams of tendency that produced the Methodist Church. If we have rightly discerned the social, moral, and religious condition of this country at that time, we shall see that the full tide of national thought and feeling ran against the evangelists who changed the character of England. The authority of the Bible was shaken by the Deistic controversy; religion had fallen into contempt; the world-resisting force of the churches had waned; an insatiable love of pleasure drove the people of all classes far from the calm delights of inward religion; the consciousness of God and of Eternity had almost disappeared. It was only here and there that little groups of men and women cultivated the graces and experiences of the Christian life and character. The task Wesley had to accomplish was to stop the down-drifting current of national life, and turn it into another channel. The power by which he stayed the flood

was not his own; it was not the power of method and of organization; it was the mighty power of God.

In speaking of a revival of religion we insisted on the fact that it is a manifestation of the special presence and influence of the Holy Spirit. For such manifestation there is a 'set time,' and that time came to England in the eighteenth century. The wind came from heaven, it blew where it listed, its sound was heard in the towns and villages of England, and under its influence the deadly mists were dispersed, the veiled heavens were cleared, a new spring day of fresh, full, more abundant life shone about the people who, having walked in darkness, saw a great light.

When John and Charles Wesley, and the 'lay preachers,' began their work in the small towns and little villages of England, they soon came in contact with the English mob. When Whitefield and Wesley commenced to preach we do not see those outbursts of fury against them which afterwards occurred. That fact is worth studying. It cannot be understood without recalling certain considerations which we have previously suggested. The national instinct for brutal sports must be remembered. Men who delighted in torturing animals would revel in the sufferings of a helpless preacher who stood among them without weapon or other means of defence. To stone him, to pelt him with clods, to trample him on the ground, to fling him into a pond or a river, to set bull-dogs upon him, to beat him with clubs,—all such assaults

## 258 The Revival of Religion in England

were natural to a brutalized people who were quick to break into riot, and to batter each other to death. We are convinced, however, that simple love of cruelty does not fully account for the mob violence that so often threatened the lives of the Methodist evangelists. The hostility of the Church to the new preachers was displayed at the outset of the movement; and it was not confined to acts of exclusion from pulpits. At an early stage of his career, Wesley makes a significant remark. He says that the report was spread abroad that he was a Jesuit, and he mournfully admits that the principal agents in circulating the report were clergymen. We have seen, in a previous chapter, how easily the passions of the mob were excited by the fear of Popery. Those who wish to gauge the strength of that fear should attempt to measure the fury of the mob at the time of the Gordon riots. Anything that seemed like Popery in disguise excited the passions of the multitude. In a moment they became the champions of the Church of England, and displayed their loyalty by assaulting and slaying suspected Papists. It is indisputable that Methodism was considered, at one time, a danger to the Church of England. It, therefore, became a test of loyalty to abuse its representatives. It is possible, on this theory, to explain an extraordinary fact. In many parts of the country the mobs that hustled and beat the Methodist preachers were led by clergymen. The 'love of cruelty' theory does not explain this phenomenon; there must

have been some other motive that urged these parish ministers to plunge into the fray. We are convinced that the widespread impression was that the Church was 'in danger.' At that dread word the tocsin sounded, and the clergy gathered their drunken battalions together and drove the Methodist preachers out of their parishes. We have no wish to dwell upon the disgraceful scenes that occurred in the course of the Great Revival. They belonged, so far as Wesley is concerned, to his earlier days of evangelism. Gradually he was understood and revered, and the rioting abated or ceased when he was present. But the lay preachers were not so fortunate. When they appeared the fury broke out again, and assaults upon them continued, intermittently, into the last century.

If Methodism had not come into contact with the mob it would never have reached the section of the English people which most needed salvation. The 'Religious Societies,' shut up in their rooms, would never have reformed the country. It was necessary that a race of heroic men should arise who would dare to confront the wildest and most brutal men in England, and tell them the meaning of sin, and show them the Christ of the Cross and of the Judgment Throne. The incessant assaults of the mob on the Methodist preachers showed that they had reached the masses. With a superb courage, rarely, if ever, equalled on the battlefield, the Methodist preachers went, again and again, to the places from which they



## 260 The Revival of Religion in England

had been driven by violence, until their persistence wore down the antagonism of their assailants. Then, out of the once furious crowd, men and women were gathered whose hearts the Lord had touched. They lingered after the service to speak to the preacher, who, in some quiet room, instructed them in the way of salvation, joined them into a small Society, and placed them under the care of a leader whose whole life was given up to the congenial task of guarding, encouraging, and training them for heaven. In this way the work of Methodism was done in every part of the country. Out of the mob the Methodist preachers gathered some of their strongest and most daring evangelists, and some of the brightest examples of the triumphs of the grace of God in the life of man.

In considering the question of the mobbing of the Methodist preachers it is possible to perceive an incidental advantage which was secured by the violence of the assailants. We have shown that, in the eighteenth century, England was a country of small towns and little villages. That fact must be remembered when we contrast the effects produced by preaching in the present day and in the time of Wesley. The coming of Wesley, or of one of his preachers, into a town of two thousand inhabitants stirred it to its deeps; the people flocked together 'gaping and staring,' wild with excitement. As the stones began to fly, the news spread, until there was

scarcely a person in the town who was ignorant of the fact that the preacher had come. Now, the population of some of those towns, especially in Lancashire and Yorkshire, numbers nearly one hundred thousand people. The arrival of a Methodist preacher in them produces no excitement. But Wesley was well advertised. There were small towns that furnished mobs that marched into the dales, and invaded the villages in which it had been whispered that he was to preach. As the little congregation assembled under the oak-tree on the green, they sometimes saw the mob from a neighbouring town coming down the hill-side like a black cloud. Suddenly it broke upon them in violent storm. Then came that wonderful illustration of Wesley's influence. He continued to speak in the midst of the uproar; his voice arrested the men who had come to destroy him; they were silenced; their purpose was turned aside; and when the service was over, and he descended from horse-block, or table, or little mound, the crowd opened up, and a way was made for him along which he walked with a tranquil mind.

By his contact with the fierce mobs of England, Wesley gained the opportunity of testing the power of the doctrines he preached to reform men who were distinguished by their wildness and wickedness. It may be taken for granted that, in the eighteenth century, every method of effecting the reformation of the masses had failed. Repression had been tried.

## 262 The Revival of Religion in England

That discredited weapon had been handed down from the time of the Commonwealth, and 'the reign of the saints.' But repression never effects a radical and permanent change in the morals of a nation. It drives glaring manifestations of immorality under the surface, but they reappear as soon as the repression ceases. John Wesley went down into the gloomy valley in which his countrymen lay in their misery. As he faced the spectacle of their wretchedness his one hope was that of the prophet who saw the dry bones whitening the earth. He knew that if the Spirit of God breathed upon these sinful men they would live, they would start to their feet, they would become a great army. And so he prophesied to the four winds. He preached to swearers and drunkards and felons the doctrines that had brought life to his own heart. He did not rest until they were convinced of sin. He knew that a man cannot see Christ in the full radiance of His mercy until he has first seen the exceeding sinfulness of his own sins. When the conviction of sin was wrought, then the Cross was unveiled, and the conscious assurance of forgiveness filled the soul with strange delight. Wesley saw that the remedy was not repression, but the shedding abroad in the heart of the love of God by the Holy Ghost. He knew that the love of God would transform the man and lead him into a new life. His remedy was tried on the worst men that England contained; on those who were the terror of towns and villages and

a disgrace to the civilization of the time. It was found efficient. It was demonstrated that there was not a vice in the whole category of human corruptions that could not be burnt away by the fire of the love of God; that there was not a criminal carted to Tyburn who was out of the reach of the mercy of the Saviour. Once for all the effectiveness of the gospel was absolutely proved; and, from that hour, the Christian Church has seen the star of hope glittering over the most wretched and sinful of the children of men.

It is not necessary that we should trace in detail the course of the Great Revival. It will suffice if we furnish one illustration of the results of Wesley's work in a part of England which still maintains its pre-eminence as the Methodist county.

In these days Cornwall is familiar to the tourist who seeks for blue seas and the sweep of a splendid coast. But, in the eighteenth century, Cornwall was a secluded country. It was known by the packmen who pushed their way on horseback over its moors and along its bridle-paths; but to the general mass of Englishmen it was an unknown land. The Cornishmen worked in the mines, or sailed their fishing-boats, or cultivated their farms, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot.' The veil that covered that old life has been lifted, and we can now see it with some approach to clearness. The people attract us. They are Celts. They have the imagination of



## 264 The Revival of Religion in England

that race, and possess its dramatic power. They think and talk in pictures. On the religious side they seem sometimes, like their kinsmen in Brittany, to be just emerging from nature-worship. They are full of superstition. Some of the churches that stand on breezy headlands, or in the dull villages and little towns, do something to relieve the darkness; but most of the clergymen have been unable to resist the influences of their surroundings, and have sunk to the level of their parishioners. The evil that is in men's hearts takes its way unchecked by an effective Christianity. There is a welcome point of light in Truro. There Samuel Walker preaches a gospel which he illustrates by the deeds of a beautiful life. Here and there, also, is a glimmer of goodness that shines from some storm-thrashed granite church. But these gleams only intensify the gloom. Priests and people are alike. Many of the clergy belong to the 'old school' of drunken, hunting, rough-tongued parsons. Some of them share the characteristic vices of the county, and their lives travesty the truths which they drearily read to their scanty congregations out of their prayer-books and Bibles on Sunday. There is no reason to doubt the correctness of Samuel Walker's description of the people by whom he was surrounded. He says —

I observe in general, that in all ranks and orders of men professing Christianity and the practice of religion, there is yet so little of it to be found, that all seriousness and

decency are actually put out of countenance; and a man must have a large share of resolved piety not to be drawn by the authority of the great, and the example of the multitude, into infidel or libertine notions, or licentious practice. Indeed, there seems to be a general conspiracy in the cause of wickedness, by which every man, one would think, was engaged to entice his neighbour into the unchristian practices of which the world, in one shape or other, is guilty.<sup>1</sup>

Cornwall, in the eighteenth century, gained unenviable notoriety as a county in which wrecking and smuggling were carried on without the slightest compunction. The former practice was hideous. The day was distant when a storm-driven foreign captain could say: 'We knew it was the English coast, because we saw the life-boat coming out.' In the eighteenth century ships were lured to their destruction. In the night-time false lights were burned to induce vessels to steer for the jagged rocks, where they were broken in pieces by the sweep of the tide. The news that a ship was wrecked was often welcomed as a kindly intervention of Providence. There was a rush to the shore, the clergyman sometimes leading the plundering crowd. There seemed to be little pity in the hearts of the people for the men whose bodies were scattered over the sands. A long course of brutal sport had produced its effect, and the feelings of the people were blunted and hardened against spectacles of human suffering.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Samuel Walker*, by Sidney, pp. 14, 15.

## 266 The Revival of Religion in England

Defoe tells us that many Englishmen had been sacrificed abroad in resentment for these barbarities. He says that when a vessel, of which he was himself a shareholder, was sinking on the coast of Biscay, a Spanish ship refused to give any assistance, the captain declaring—

that, having been shipwrecked somewhere on the coast of England, the people, instead of saving him and his ship, came off and robbed him, tore the ship almost to pieces, and left him and his men to swim ashore for their lives while they plundered the cargo; upon which he and his whole crew had sworn never to help an Englishman, in whatever distress he should find him, whether at sea or on shore.

Lecky tells us that about the middle of the eighteenth century, the crime of wrecking increased to an enormous degree on many parts of the British coasts, and that it was the especial scandal of Cornwall.<sup>1</sup> The Government passed severe measures to repress the practice. The crime was made a capital offence; but, in spite of threatened punishment, it continued unchecked.

Sydney says that every sea-coast town or village, especially in the western and south-western counties of England, had some smugglers among the inhabitants. Their operations were generally connived at by the neighbouring gentry and clergy. The trade in 'uncustomed goods' was rife in Cornwall, and it led

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, vol. i. p. 489.

to scenes of violence, and to the demoralization of the people of the county. All classes treated the offence lightly. It was held that there was nothing wrong in robbing the revenue, and so the 'free traders,' supported by public opinion, carried on their work briskly. So long as smuggling paid the practice was continued, whole villages being maintained by it. The policy of the Government in placing a high duty on foreign spirituous liquors in order to increase the business of the English distiller introduced a deadly form of intoxication into the country. The mischief arising from this fatal mistake spread further. The high duties on foreign liquors led to a largely increased number of smugglers, and smuggling brought with it the evils which always accompany contraband trade.

Cornwall became the scene of some of the greatest triumphs of the Evangelical Revival. It is interesting to note the way in which the attention of the Wesleys was attracted to the county. There is in existence a fragment of the Roll of the Bristol Society, in the handwriting of John Wesley, dated January 1, 1741. Looking through the names, we pause at that of Joseph Turner. He was a sea-captain. On one of his voyages, in 1743, he landed at St. Ives, in Cornwall, and 'was agreeably surprised to find a few persons who feared God, and constantly met together. They were much refreshed by him, as he was by them.'<sup>1</sup> When he returned to Bristol he mentioned this incident. It

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of Wesley Historical Society*, vol. iv. p. 95.



## 268 The Revival of Religion in England

excited the interest of Charles Wesley, and he made up his mind to visit Cornwall. He rode from Bristol, through Exeter and Redruth, to St. Ives, arriving there on July 16, 1743. On his way to the town two 'tinnners' met him, and wished him good luck in the name of the Lord. His next meeting with the Cornishmen was not so pleasant. A mob shouted at him, and pursued him 'like the men out of the tombs.' The news of his coming had preceded him, and the clergy had prepared the way for his reception. Thomas Jackson says that they preached against him with great vehemence, and represented his character and designs in the worst possible light; and so the people were ready everywhere to congregate in mobs, and perpetrate any outrage.<sup>1</sup> At St. Ives, as we have seen, there was a Religious Society, so Charles Wesley was not quite friendless. The mayor also was a Presbyterian, and did his utmost to protect him. His influence, however, was not strong enough to counteract that of the clergy. When the mob assaulted Charles Wesley, the mayor told him that 'the ministers were the principal authors of all this evil.' They continually represented him in their sermons as a Popish emissary, and urged the enraged multitude to take all manner of ways to stop him. 'Yet,' says Charles Wesley, who, like his brother, had the saving sense of humour, 'they modestly say, my fellow labourer and I are the cause of all the

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Charles Wesley*, vol. i. p. 339.

disturbance! It is always the lamb that troubles the water.' But although stoned as 'a Popish incendiary,' the people flocked to hear him, and the great doctrines of the gospel gradually softened and melted their hearts. Rough 'tinnors' and smugglers and wreckers were converted, and the county was dotted with Societies, which increased in number as John and Charles Wesley repeated their visits. Gradually the opposition died down; the clergy lost their power to inflame the passions of the multitude, and that wonderful moral and religious transformation took place which has raised Cornwall to a unique position among the counties of England.

It is singular that a man like Samuel Walker, of Truro, should have looked askance at the work of the Methodists in Cornwall. He came into contact with John and Charles Wesley, and corresponded with them. The letters on either side are self-revealing. Walker was convinced that his own plan of forming Religious Societies in strict connexion with the Church, carried on under the supervision of the clergy, and free from any taint of 'enthusiasm' or 'irregularity,' was the method best adapted to the work of reformation. He had a horror of lay preaching, and, indeed, of everything which suggested the distressing thought of separation from the Church. He was held in great respect for his piety and his work; but the practical note is strangely absent in his correspondence. He had not the wisdom of the man who sees facts, and

## 270 The Revival of Religion in England

adapts means to ends. John Wesley's mind was of another order. He saw that Walker's method was useful in a time that was favourable to religion, but that the antagonism of a violent people to Jesus Christ could only be subdued by new modes of work. And so he was true to his motto—'Church or no Church, we must save souls.' While Walker, by the use of his sedate methods, was assisting a small number of people to accept and appreciate the doctrines which nourish a sober, circumspect, and godly life, Wesley and his lay preachers were standing on the moors and the hill-sides of Cornwall, opening the gates of the kingdom of heaven to multitudes of men and women who had never darkened the doors of a church, or showed the slightest appreciation of real religion. The doctrines preached by the evangelists broke their hearts, and led them to surrender themselves to the Christ whom they saw stretched on the cross for their sins. They were gathered into the Methodist Society, and found in the class-meeting the sphere which was best adapted to the defence and increase of their spiritual life. Sidney, when describing the 'conversation classes' formed by Samuel Walker, contrasts them with the Methodist meetings, in which 'the recital of experience' forms such a prominent part of the proceedings. He says—

Such a communication of the progress of religion in an individual is often, happily, made to one friend at a time; but to introduce it as a topic of general conversation will,

it is feared, in a majority of instances, be attended with more harm than edification. A conversation of pious people coming together to clear up doubts, to examine fundamentals, to animate to perseverance, to exhort to duty, to excite to prayer, and to insist on growth in holiness, will ever be truly valuable ; but the secrets of the heart should be laid open only in private intercourse with a minister or friend, and before God in the closet.<sup>1</sup>

The picture of wreckers and smugglers coming together to 'clear up doubts' and to 'examine fundamentals,' appeals to our sense of humour. That work would not have continued long. But when they came with the joyous tidings that once they were blind but now they saw ; when they described the battles they had fought with the tempter, and the victory they had won through the might of the Captain of their Salvation ; when, in answer to prayer, they saw their old comrades stepping into the light of the kingdom of heaven ; when they sang the great 'experience' hymns of Charles Wesley,—then power swept down upon them from on high. The weekly class-meeting was the source from which they derived inspiration for the march and the battle of life. It is strange that Walker did not discern the practical value of Wesley's methods. He would have done so, we think, if he had followed his own advice : 'Keep full in view the interests of Christ's Church in general, and of practical religion, not considering the Church of England, or

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Samuel Walker*, p. 448.



## 272 The Revival of Religion in England

the cause of Methodism, but as subordinate thereto.' Loyal at all costs to that guiding principle, he would have ceased to criticize Wesley, and would have joined hands with him in the great task of evangelizing the neglected myriads of the county of Cornwall.

## IX

## Some Results of the Revival

IN describing the Great Revival we have regarded it as a national event of supreme importance. It is certain that it affected the country at large, and permanently changed the conditions of English life and character. In seeking to estimate its results, we must maintain our standpoint.

There is one aspect of our present inquiry which we may dismiss in a few sentences. When dealing with 'results,' it is natural to turn towards the numerical side of a subject. On this aspect of the revival it will be enough to say that when Wesley died there were upwards of one hundred and twenty thousand members in the 'United Societies.' Some of them were found in other countries. Wesley's work soon passed beyond the narrow boundaries of these islands. Evangelists were sent out into America and the West Indies, and there they published the glad tidings of the gospel to multitudes of colonists and slaves. This true missionary work was done in the remote regions of Wesley's 'parish' long before William

## 274 The Revival of Religion in England

Carey sailed for India, and, with the exception of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, several years before the great Missionary Societies were formed. Since 1791, when Wesley died, the witness of the Methodist evangelist has been borne in many lands, and now the membership of the Methodist Churches throughout the world amounts to upwards of eight and a quarter millions of persons. John Wesley never dreamed that, in a little more than a century and a half, the small Society gathered in the Foundery would grow until it reached the size of the population of the England of his day. But the 'membership returns' do not fully represent the 'results' achieved by the Methodist Churches. It must be borne in mind that there is a distinction between 'members' and 'adherents.' Round the nucleus of the 'membership' is gathered a great mass of people bearing the Methodist name. Their number is a matter of speculation. Some statisticians hold that for each 'member' at least three 'adherents' should be counted; others are in favour of a lower estimate. It is difficult to decide an often debated question; but we think that it is no exaggeration to say that, at the present time, there are upwards of twenty-five millions of persons in the world who may be considered as Methodists. Even these large figures do not adequately represent the numerical results of the Great Revival. To them must be added the people who, during a century and a half, have been influenced by the preaching of the

gospel and the training of the Methodist Churches. Who can enumerate the vanished multitude that has passed through the Methodist Societies and congregations on its way to the invisible City of God?

The realm of statistics is fascinating to minds of a certain order; but we willingly quit it that we may bring into view some of the social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual results which have been produced in England through the influence of the Great Revival.

We have seen the perilous condition of the State Church at the time when Whitefield and Wesley commenced their evangelistic work in England. Clergy and people were contented with a view of 'religion' that was remarkable for its 'sobriety' and ineffectiveness. They abhorred 'enthusiasm.' When the wandering evangelists began to preach doctrines which impeached human nature, and demanded its regeneration by the Spirit of God, they guarded their pulpits against them, and turned them out to test the truth of their teaching on the rabble in the fields. The sentiments expressed by the Duchess of Buckingham, the illegitimate daughter of James II, in her well-known letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, were prevalent. She writes—

I thank your Ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preaching; these doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and do away with all distinction, as it is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common



## 276 The Revival of Religion in England

wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting, and I cannot but wonder that your Ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.

It was no wonder that persons, whose views are fairly represented in the Duchess of Buckingham's letter, stood at the church doors and waved the evangelists away. The success of the men who defended the Church of England against the intrusion of the Methodists was conspicuous. Canon Overton and Mr. Relton, speaking of the period ending with the year 1760, say—

If any one expects that from the beginning of the Evangelical Revival, in its earlier form of Methodism, an improvement in the state of the Church will be perceptible, he will be disappointed. It is quite the reverse. The immediate effects of Methodism upon the Church were rather to make Churchmen set their faces all the more against the religion of feeling than to attract them to it; and though it is difficult to generalize on such a subject, the state of religion in the Church does not appear to have been any better at the end of our second period than it was at the beginning.<sup>1</sup>

The statement we have just quoted is, generally speaking, correct. But although the Church took every precaution to defend itself against the 'religion of feeling,' it was difficult to secure absolute immunity. The influences of a Great Revival are pervasive and penetrating. They are 'in the air.' At such a time

<sup>1</sup> *History of the English Church*, p. 73.

a vitalized atmosphere encompasses all the Churches, and some of it steals into enclosures which are supposed to be hermetically sealed. In following the early work of Whitefield, it is noticeable that his preaching not only affected the crowd, but also made a deep impression on persons who occupied a high social position. During his successive visits to England the circle of his fashionable hearers was enlarged. We have mentioned the name of the Countess of Huntingdon. Her name suggests striking episodes in the history of the Great Revival, and throws a steady light upon the relation of the aristocracy to that event. In her house there were frequent gatherings of persons belonging to her own social rank who were brought together to hear the famous preacher. At one time he was lionized by a section of Society. Assemblies, containing men and women whose names still shine in English history, were held, and to them he declared the truths of the gospel. John Wesley was not so successful in reaching the aristocracy. Still, in reading his *Journals* we note, again and again, that the pages are brightened by terse descriptions of his visits to great houses, standing in their solemn woodlands, in which he found a welcome, and where he spoke, heart to heart, with high-born men and women who listened eagerly to the good news of salvation. But, while we do not overlook the direct and indirect influence of Whitefield and Wesley on some of the members of the Church, we are convinced they must not be regarded

## 278 The Revival of Religion in England

as the creators of that Evangelical Party within the Church which accomplished so much for God at the close of the eighteenth century.

The rise of an Evangelical Party within the Church of England was inevitable. The exclusion of the Methodist evangelists from the churches was a prudent measure if it had been determined by the ecclesiastical authorities that there was to be no interference with stereotyped opinions concerning religion. But prudent measures are not always rewarded with success. It was so in this case. The exclusion of the evangelist raised many questions. Men of open and inquiring minds began to ask if there was any truth in the doctrines he had preached. In the case of Wesley, it is well known that he told his clerical antagonists that if they would read the doctrinal standards of their Church they would find that he had declared the truths therein contained. It is difficult to eliminate fairness of mind from an Englishman. It seemed right that Wesley's challenge should be accepted, and that the documents should be searched. The result of honest investigation was the discovery that the Methodist evangelists were preaching in the fields the doctrines which the parish ministers ought to have preached in the pulpits. That discovery awakened the minds of some of the clergy, and induced them to face the perils of proclaiming the neglected teachings of their own Church. To the dismay of their people they did so, and were instantly branded

as 'Methodists.' But they held their ground. Slowly Truth won her certain victory, and the Evangelical Party took its stand among the world-compelling religious forces of England.

Those who have watched the emergence of the Evangelical Party above the dead level of the formalism and worldliness that afflicted the Church of England in the eighteenth century, will have been quick to sympathize with the men who led the people up to the heights of the spiritual life which had been revealed by the study of the formularies of the Church, and especially by the reading of the New Testament. Their work was encompassed with difficulties. Those difficulties, in the case of some of them, were lessened by the fact that they were incumbents. Wesley and Whitefield, men who did not even possess a licence to preach, could be cast out as intruders. But the holder of a benefice has rights and authorities in his own church which minister to his security. The people in his own parish may object to his teaching, and decline to hear him, but they cannot dismiss him at will. In the case of the beneficed clergy who preached the evangelical doctrines in their churches during the time of the Great Revival, even the superior ecclesiastical authorities were helpless. Some of the bishops were aware that the teaching was in accordance with the doctrinal standards of the Church, and so, out of conscience, they refused to interfere with them. The helplessness of the people, in the case of the beneficed clergy, and



## 280 The Revival of Religion in England

the 'masterly inaction' of the bishops, did much to assist the formation of the Evangelical Party, and to start it on its career.

The difficulties in the path of the beneficed Evangelical clergy were mitigated by the advantages they possessed. It is when we turn towards those who only held lectureships and other subordinate posts that we see the men who bore the brunt of the fight. When John Newton came to London, in 1780, he found one Evangelical incumbent there. That was William Romaine, whose experiences as a preacher of the gospel taxed his courage to the uttermost. He joined the Evangelical Party about the year 1749. In 1748 he was appointed lecturer at the united parishes of St. George's, Botolph Lane, and St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate. In 1749 he was appointed to a double lectureship at St. Dunstan's-in-the-West; and in 1753 he became morning preacher at St. George's, Hanover Square. When Romaine preached to the fashionable congregation at St. George's, he attracted a crowd of poor people, who filled the church, and their presence so scandalized the ordinary worshippers that pressure was brought to bear on him, and, at the request of the vicar, he resigned his lectureship. At St. Dunstan's-in-the-West, in Fleet Street, the poor flocked to hear him; the throng was so great that the parishioners had to force their way to their pews through 'a ragged, unsavoury multitude.' The rector came to the rescue of the aggrieved parishioners, and

prevented Romaine from occupying the pulpit by sitting in it himself. The action of the rector led to a trial in the King's Bench. Romaine was deprived of one of his lectureships, which was supported by voluntary contributions, but continued in the other, and the use of the church was granted to him at seven o'clock in the evening. The churchwardens were equal to the occasion. They refused to open the church a moment before seven, and they refused to light it. The result was that Romaine had often to preach in the dark, holding a candle in his hand. But the churchwardens went too far. On one occasion Dr. Terrick, the Bishop of London, officiated in St. Dunstan's in the evening, and then noticed that the doors of the church were closed, although he knew that Romaine was to preach immediately afterwards. He asked the reason, and discovering it, put a stop to the persecution.

But [says Canon Overton] the poor man was still driven from pillar to post. His own university refused him the pulpit of St. Mary's, and the hostility of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster drove him from a preachership at a chapel of ease to St. Margaret's, Westminster. . . . Perhaps Romaine was not a very genial, conciliatory man; perhaps his foreign extraction may have been a hindrance to his understanding English ways: but he was absolutely without reproach; his abilities and attainments much above the average; his earnestness and piety, his orthodoxy and loyalty to the Church unquestioned. The chief objection against him was that he succeeded in doing what good

## 282    The Revival of Religion in England

Churchpeople of all types are longing to see done. He drew the poor to church, and mainly for this grave offence he suffered annoyance which amounted to persecution.<sup>1</sup>

Romaine at last secured a position in London which was unassailable by his antagonists. In 1764 he was elected to the living of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, which was in the gift of the parishioners; but the poll was disputed, and he was kept out of it for two years. In 1766, however, the Court of Chancery confirmed his right to the benefice, and for twenty-nine years he ministered with great success in his own church. He lived to see a slow but steady increase in the number of the Evangelical clergy in London, and when he died a multitude of sorrowing people followed him to the tomb.

It is not necessary that we should pursue the history of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England. Its progress may be judged by the fact that the number of its clergy, which did not exceed, according to the estimate of Mr. Gladstone, one in twenty at the close of the reign of George III, had risen to one in eight at the death of George IV. The party never became actually dominant in the Church, but its influence on the religious life of the country has been profound.

The Great Revival produced considerable effects on the State Church; it also directly and indirectly

<sup>1</sup> *History of the English Church*, p. 153.

influenced the Dissenters. The effect on the latter would have been greater had it not been for the existence of facts which are sometimes overlooked. It must be remembered that the Dissenters, for long years, had been engaged in fighting the battle of religious liberty, and that it had been fought mainly with political weapons. We heartily recognize the services rendered by the men who bore the stress of the struggle, and who gained a victory which still affects the fortunes of Nonconformity in this country; but it must be admitted that the triumph was not achieved without religious loss. Political controversy exacts a toll from the spiritual men who indulge in it. When a Church gives its time and its strength to battles that have to be fought out in the political arena, the keenness of its zeal for evangelistic work is often dulled. In the eighteenth century the Dissenters were so exhausted by their fight for existence that they had no heart for the great evangelizing mission in which they should have eagerly shared.

Another fact must also be weighed. The theological and religious standpoint of the Dissenters differed widely from those occupied by Wesley and the principal agents in the Great Revival. The doctrines of Calvin, concerning election and reprobation, formed a barrier which divided them; but we think that they were more effectually sundered by another division of opinion. Dr. R. W. Dale has stated the view of the old Dissenters so clearly that we will content



## 284 The Revival of Religion in England

ourselves with quoting his words. In his *History of English Congregationalism*, he says—

For some years the great majority of the Congregationalists regarded the new movement with deep distrust. . . . The ways of Methodism were wholly unlike their own. They had been accustomed to hope that their children would be gradually drawn to Christ by the gentle influence of Christian homes. If they grew up to manhood and womanhood without showing any signs of personal religious faith, they trusted that by the orderly services of the meeting-house religious thought would be gradually awakened, religious purpose gradually strengthened, and that after some months—perhaps some years—of solicitude, they would be able to rest in the divine mercy for eternal salvation. They did not deny the possibility of sudden conversion; but they were unfamiliar with it. They found it hard to believe that a man might go into a Methodist meeting a swearer and a drunkard, and be ‘born again,’ and ‘find peace,’ and rejoice in ‘the full assurance’ of his salvation, before the meeting broke up.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction so clearly defined by Dr. Dale shows the line of cleavage which divided not only the Congregationalists but all other Dissenters from the Methodists. There can be no doubt that the opinion of the Dissenters concerning the gradual way in which men and women are brought to God has much that is true and beautiful in it. Holding it firmly, they gave themselves up to the culture of the religious life in their congregations, and they produced a type of piety which wins our respect. Especially, in some places,

<sup>1</sup> pp. 583, 584.

they were successful in realizing an ideal of Christian family life that was charming. The man who has never stood to admire the lovely pictures of family life that are revealed in the Dissenting biographies of the period has much to learn concerning the influences which, in that day of danger, preserved the noblest virtues of the English character. But the theory described by Dr. Dale is defective as a working force, inasmuch as it fails to include the case of the people who are outside the Church, and who will not present themselves in the 'meeting-houses' for the 'gradual' cultivation of the religious life. The Dissenters were helpless in the presence of the non-church-going population of England, and one sign of their weakness was the irritability which they occasionally displayed when they watched the new methods which were employed by the evangelists who went out to seek and save the lost sheep.

The Dissenters and the Methodists were also separated by an impalpable barrier, which often proves itself stronger than walls of brass. The Dissenters were conscious and careful of their 'respectability,' and, in their view, the Methodists were vulgar, violent, and illiterate. A conviction of our own superiority embarrasses the freedom of our intercourse with those whom we deem to be our social inferiors. The inconvenience of such a conviction was illustrated in the case of the Dissenters and the Methodists in the eighteenth century. It is pleasant to note that there

## 286 The Revival of Religion in England

was at least one man who rose above the prejudices of the day. Dr. Doddridge associated with Wesley and Whitefield, although his fraternal action excited the condemnation of Dr. Watts and Dr. Jennings. When Whitefield was in Northampton he preached in Doddridge's pulpit, and shocked the Coward trustees, who were the principal supporters of the 'Academy' which he conducted. Nathaniel Neal, the secretary of the Trust, wrote immediately to tell Doddridge that the information had given him the 'utmost concern'; that 'the matter was canvassed' at a meeting of the trustees; and he adds, 'I now find myself obliged to apprise you of the very great uneasiness which your conduct herein has occasioned them.' Then follows a long appeal to Doddridge to reflect 'in how disadvantageous a light' his regard for the Methodists had placed him in the opinion of many of his 'judicious' friends, and what an advantage it had given to his 'secret and avowed enemies.' The trustees were 'particularly in pain' on account of the harm 'that Doddridge's sympathy with the Methodists was likely to inflict on the 'Academy.' It appears that not only had he allowed Whitefield to preach in his pulpit, but he had prefixed a recommendation to a Methodist book without the advice of the trustees; and he was informed that the letter which he had written 'excusing' this presumption, had given the trustees 'great offence.'<sup>1</sup>

The censure passed on Doddridge is symptomatic of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Dale's *History of English Congregationalism*, pp. 584, 585.

the feeling of the time. There can be no doubt that any friendliness shown by Dissenting ministers towards the Methodists made them liable to hostile criticism. Is it any wonder that it was difficult for the influences of the Great Revival to pass over the barriers with which the Dissenters had enclosed themselves in the earlier years of the eighteenth century? But, as time went on its way, and the central meaning of Methodism was more clearly understood, a change took place. In describing it, Dr. Dale says—

The fires of the Revival had been kindled from heaven, and before the accession of George III the Congregational churches had caught the flame. Their ministers were beginning to preach with a new fervour, and their preaching was followed with a new success. The religious life of their people was becoming more intense. A passion for evangelistic work was taking possession of church after church, and by the end of the century the old meeting-houses were crowded; many of them had to be enlarged, and new meeting-houses were being erected in town after town, and village after village, in every part of the kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Unassisted and unhindered by the patronage of the State Church and the Dissenters, John Wesley went out into the nation, and there accomplished the work assigned to him by the will of God. The evangelical clergy must have sometimes watched his course with envious eyes. He was free from ecclesiastical control. While they were toiling in their narrow parishes, and

<sup>1</sup> *History of English Congregationalism*, p. 585.



## 288 The Revival of Religion in England

preaching in their small churches, he was ever seeking 'fresh woods and pastures new.' A few of them, greatly daring, gave him occasional assistance, and strengthened him with counsel and sympathy, but they knew that their paths diverged. They returned to their churches, and Wesley set his face towards the unsaved masses of his fellow countrymen.

In estimating the results of the Great Revival, it is essential that we should note some of the effects which followed the liberation of Wesley from ecclesiastical control. As to the fact of his freedom there can be no question. No bishop regulated his proceedings, or exercised authority in his Societies. They left him to pursue his own course. If they had stopped his 'irregularities,' he would have snapped the link that bound him to the Church. If, for instance, they had ordered him not to employ lay preachers, and if they had threatened him with excommunication if he did not obey the command, he would have accepted the penalty. To the end of his life he was a Churchman, and the reason for his continued Churchmanship is to be found in the fact that the ecclesiastical authorities were too wise to bring him under discipline. The bishops adopted, as we have said, a policy of 'masterly inaction,' and thereby gave him an opportunity to fulfil his destiny and to accomplish his work.

Freedom is a touchstone. It reveals the character of the man who possesses it. If he uses it to serve, then we see in him the spirit of the Christian religion.

How did John Wesley employ his freedom? He dedicated himself to the service of his country, and lived a life of self-denial such as has rarely been paralleled in the history of the Church. The needs of the nation appealed to him with masterful force; they claimed every moment and every power he possessed. He lived for the people of England. In order to save them he sacrificed home and friends, health and leisure. He willingly bore the burden of poverty, and rejoiced in persecution and contempt. A man of culture and refinement, he placed a firm hand on his tastes and intellectual yearnings, and went down into the depths of the social life of England, and dwelt in the midst of misery and coarseness which wrung his heart. He spent his strength on felons and criminals, on drunkards, on wild and impure men and women, on those who had been abandoned by all Churches and all Christian people. To him we may apply, without irreverence, the splendid epithet hurled at his Master: 'He was "the friend of publicans and sinners."'

As a consequence of Wesley's self-denying work, there arose in England a new ideal of the Christian minister. It was impossible that his strenuous and beneficent life could fail to affect the men who watched it. He pervaded the country, and everywhere he was recognized as a clergyman. As he rode into a village and took his stand on the green, and then, after preaching, set his face towards the storms that howled among

## 290 The Revival of Religion in England

the hills, those who looked at him saw a new aspect of clerical life. They would compare him with their own parish minister, and would be lost in amazement. They would learn that here was a man who had ridden over the wretched roads out of sheer love of their souls, a man who received neither fee nor reward for his work, who lived upon a small private income and continually gave away large sums of money to the poor; a man who had deliberately and cheerfully cut himself off from all hope of advancement in the Church, and was content with the approval of his conscience and the commendation of Christ. When these facts concerning him were widely known, he became an object of reverence, a reverence which, towards the close of his life, was paid as a loving tribute whithersoever he wandered.

It was fortunate that John Wesley was able to modify the eighteenth-century estimate of the clergyman. He stood apart from the pluralists, the preferment-seekers, the mitre-hunters, the worldlings, the idle shepherds who neglected their flocks. He moves with distinction among the scenes of clerical life in that far-off day. His figure attracts us, even at this distance of time, as we watch it resting against the gloomy background. By his contemporaries, slowly but inevitably, the lesson of his life was learned. The criticism of the clergyman was hushed in his presence. That criticism abounds in the literature of the period. It was supercilious, bitter, contemptuous, withering, true. But men

confessed that Wesley's character endured the most searching tests. That confession established the fact that it was possible for a clergyman to be a man of honour and culture, a gentleman and a Christian.

There is a picture in Thackeray's lecture on George II which brings out the contrast between Wesley and his contemporaries with consummate skill.

As I peep into George II's Saint James's, I see crowds of cassocks rustling up the back stairs of the ladies of the Court ; stealthy clergy slipping purses into their laps ; that godless old King yawning under his canopy in his Chapel Royal, as the chaplain before him is discoursing. Discoursing about what ?—about righteousness and judgement ! Whilst the chaplain is preaching, the King is chattering in German almost as loud as the preacher ; so loud that the clergyman—it may be one Doctor Young, he who wrote 'Night Thoughts,' and discoursed on the splendours of the stars, the glories of heaven, and utter vanities of this world—actually burst out crying in his pulpit because the Defender of the Faith and dispenser of bishoprics would not listen to him ! No wonder that the clergy were corrupt and indifferent amidst this indifference and corruption. No wonder that the sceptics multiplied and morals degenerated, so far as they depended on the influence of such a King. No wonder that Whitefield cried out in the wilderness, that Wesley quitted the insulted temple to pray on the hillside. I look with reverence on those men at that time. Which is the sublimer spectacle—the good John Wesley surrounded by his congregation of miners at the pit's mouth, or the Queen's chaplains mumbling through their morning office in their ante-room, under the picture of the great Venus, with the door opened into the adjoining chamber, where the



## 292 The Revival of Religion in England

Queen is dressing, talking scandal to Lord Hervey, or uttering sneers at Lady Suffolk, who is kneeling with the basin at her mistress's side? I say I am scared as I look round at this society—at this King, at these courtiers, at these politicians, at these bishops—at this flaunting vice and levity. Whereabouts in this Court is the honest man? Where is the pure person one may like? The air stifles one with its sickly perfumes.

The contrast suggested by Thackeray struck Englishmen in the eighteenth century. It made a deep impression on the popular mind, and that impression was not the least of the results of the Great Revival.

The Revival introduced a new type of clergyman into England. It also gave to the country preachers in whom the best traditions of the Early Church were revived. We have shown that in the sub-Apostolic age 'apostles,' 'prophets,' and 'teachers' itinerated among the churches, preaching the gospel and witnessing for Christ. They served with absolute self-denial and with an heroic ardour.<sup>1</sup> Wesley's lay preachers were their true successors. They moved about from place to place, finding shelter in the homes of their people, eating such things as were set before them, lavishly rendering poorly paid services on obscure villagers and insignificant townsmen whose spiritual darkness they turned to marvellous light. Great were their sufferings and sore their straits. Sometimes

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, pp. 31-33.

they lived habitually on the verge of starvation. Their quiet endurance pained the heart of Wesley. Out of his slender resources he helped them, often commending to them the text which tried their faith: 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed' (Ps. xxxvii. 3). Those who have read the *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* and the Letters of John Wesley will be familiar with touching episodes which reveal the experiences of the men who marched and fought in the great campaign. Despite of suffering, however, the work was done, and an example of self-sacrificing toil was set which is a rebuke and an inspiration to Church workers throughout the world.

The Great Revival brought back the Apostolic type of the Christian minister into the Church; it also recovered, restated, and reaffirmed, the most conspicuous doctrines in the Apostolic teaching. In Christ's last conversation with His disciples before He suffered, He spoke words which were explained on the day of Pentecost, and which have flashed out new light in every great revival of religion. He told His disciples that when the Spirit came He would 'convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement' (John xvi. 8). In watching the progress of the Great Revival we have seen that the 'conviction in respect of sin' was the starting-point in the spiritual experience of the chief agents in the movement. In their hour of sorrow they brooded over

the evil of their life. They saw that sin was horrible in itself, and that it laid them under the condemnation of God. The contemplation of their personal sin drove them into desperate efforts to still their consciences by prayer and fasting and self-sacrifice. But these efforts were in vain. A sense of helplessness and hopelessness remained, and over them hung the threatening cloud of the anger of God. They were conscious of a wrath that had come as well as a wrath that would overwhelm them in the future. In the darkness they faced the problem of sin, they searched its abysmal deeps, and they learned lessons which lie at the heart of evangelical teaching—lessons which must be learned if that teaching is not to be weak and mischievous. These men, by the experience of an inexpressible sadness, regained that conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin that can only be wrought in the conscience by the Holy Spirit of God.

When the men who had passed through the experience we have described stood before their wild and turbulent audiences, they arraigned them as sinners before the bar of God. They felt that nothing was done by their preaching so long as the conscience was unreached and the heart unmoved. So they set up the rigorous standard of the law in the midst of the people; they made them see 'the great white throne' and Him who sat upon it; they spoke of hell as men who had been down to the iron gates and had gazed upon the horrors of death eternal. Every appeal was

pointed with their own experience; it winged every arrow that flew into the hearts of their hearers. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the punishment of sin was the only aspect of the dire problem they presented in their sermons. Had they done so, they would have forgotten the course of their own spiritual history. John Wesley, for instance, during the time of his darkness, was concerned to be saved from sin, not from hell. He remembered this fact, and when he preached he aimed at breaking up the indifference of his audience, and then, when that purpose was effected, he deepened the impression by showing that sin was an offence against a God who was not only a Judge, but a Father whose infinite love for the world had been manifested by the gift of His Son. The Master had prophesied that the Spirit would convict men of sin by showing them that they had not believed in Him. He would convince them that they had been blind to all that Christ represents—the severity of law, the hatefulness of sin, the boundless patience, pity, and loving-kindness of the Lord. Wesley, as time went by, found that the Spirit of God works as He lists, and he was content if he saw that a true conviction of sin had been wrought in a man. It was enough for him that conscience had been awakened, and he did not inquire too curiously concerning the source of the light that had disturbed its slumber. It might have streamed from a vision of judgement or from heaven; better still, it might have



## 296 The Revival of Religion in England

fallen from those gentle eyes whose look broke the Apostle's heart. The one essential thing was that sin should be seen and bemoaned and hated, that it should drive a man to the cross of Christ and make him miserable until he realized the unspeakable joy of abundant pardon.

The Great Revival explained the meaning of the 'conviction in respect of sin'; it also did much to show what is meant by the 'conviction in respect of righteousness.' It is confessed that, up to this hour, the Church has not grasped the full meaning of this phrase. Christ told His disciples that the 'conviction in respect of righteousness' would come through the realization of the fact that He had gone away, that He had departed to the Father. As we listen to the discourse in the 'upper room' the words 'I go away' frequently fall upon our ears. They are not altogether words of sadness; they do not seem to apply exclusively to the journey to the cross. They point to a pilgrimage beyond the cross and the grave and the forty days after the Resurrection. 'If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I go to the Father.' The Christian Church still bends over these words, desiring to look into them. They are words of shadow and of insufferable light. In connexion with the 'conviction' we are considering, they suggest that there is a revelation of 'righteousness' in the death, the resurrection, and the heavenly life of our Lord which it is the special mission of the Spirit to explain. By 'righteousness'

we do not understand 'justice,' although conviction concerning the justice of God does much to humble the sinner and cast him into the dust. 'Righteousness' is, rather, the purity and holiness of God which is revealed to us by the Spirit who manifests the Christ who toiled to the cross, the Christ who passed along the viewless pathways of the sky to the house of His Father in heaven. As the 'conviction in respect of sin' drives a man to the Saviour from sin, so the 'conviction in respect of righteousness' impels him to enter on the quest after holiness; it fills him with a consuming desire to be as Christ was in this world.

The astronomers tell of a star that has a dark companion. Silently they move together in the fields of space, inseparably connected in history and destiny. The Great Revival brought into prominence the double stars—sin and righteousness. God has joined them together, and no man can put them asunder. The perils haunting the doctrine of justification by faith have often been described, and are indisputable. But John Wesley perceived these dangers, and so far as a man can guard others against spiritual mischiefs, he defended the doctrine of salvation by faith against abuse. He insisted on the necessity of 'the new birth,' and taught that the assurance of forgiveness which was not followed by a changed life was a delusion. Beginning with this point, he incessantly proclaimed the need of holiness. He was fiercely assailed because of his 'extreme' teaching on the subject.

## 298 The Revival of Religion in England

That teaching was misrepresented ; it was described in terms which he persistently rejected ; it excited the ridicule and ribaldry of scornful assailants ; but, to the end of his life, he steadfastly held the conviction that if a man 'hungers and thirsts' after 'righteousness,' he shall be 'filled' with it.

The secret of Wesley's loyalty to the doctrine of 'Christian Perfection' was that he had been convinced of 'righteousness' by the Holy Spirit. He had seen Christ, and had learned that it was possible for him to be like his Lord. If we admit the possibility of Christ-likeness, the admission carries with it the best and highest things that Wesley said concerning 'Christian Perfection.' In the days of his earlier experiences, he had studied Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and it profoundly impressed him. When, in after-years, the light of the great illumination shone around him, and he saw the innermost meaning of the doctrine, he preached it with an enthusiasm which was constantly quickened by visions of his pure and perfect Lord.

In describing the mission of the Comforter, Christ assured His disciples that the Holy Spirit would not only convict in respect of sin and righteousness, but also of judgement, 'because the prince of this world hath been judged.' The meaning of the 'judgement,' mentioned by our Lord, has been perverted by the popular quotation of the text. It is often said that the Spirit is to convince the world of 'judgement to come,' but

the misquotation sacrifices the glory of the prediction. The 'judgement' of which Christ spoke is a completed act; it does not refer to our own arraignment before the bar of the Divine Justice, but to the condemnation of the prince of the world. By the ministry of the Comforter men are to see that the prince of this world has failed in his conflict with Christ, that even now he is the footstool of his mighty conqueror.

The Great Revival illuminated the assurance of Christ until it shone with a dazzling brightness. It was extraordinary that Christian men should see, in such an age as the eighteenth century, that the prince of this world had received his fatal wound. But they did see it. The vision that lifted up the heart of Luther inspired them. With him they could sing—

And let the prince of ill  
Look grim as e'er he will,  
He harms us not a whit;  
For why? His doom is writ;  
A word shall quickly slay him.

The work of the Spirit in the minds of the men of the eighteenth century created a strong conviction of the ultimate success of the kingdom of Christ. It enabled them to see not only the Saviour hanging upon His cross, but also the King of kings seated on His throne. It is impossible to estimate aright the influence of that vision on Christian life and work. The extraordinary fluctuations in the fortunes of the Church coincide with the variations of its spiritual sight.



## 300 The Revival of Religion in England

When the living Christ is obscured, the advance of the Church is checked ; but when it is seen that the Son of God goes forth to war at the head of His army courage is roused, and the Church is invincible.

It must be remembered that through the preaching of Wesley the ideas of the Church concerning the extent of the world that was claimed by Christ were widened. The sharp limits drawn by the hand of Calvin were effaced, and the circle swept round the whole earth. The larger view that was taken of the philanthropy, of God brought a greater challenge to faith ; but the challenge was accepted, and the evangelists went out with confidence into all the world and preached the gospel to the whole creation.

The conviction that 'the prince of this world hath been judged' is an inspiration to the worker ; it is also an instrument used by the Spirit to effect the conversion of the sinner. When a man has lost sight of the invisible, when he worships self, when he lives only to enjoy the pleasures of the world, when he has become so unconscious of things divine that he is satisfied with carnal pleasures and the pale, wan light of earthly happiness, it is a disappointment to him to find that failure is written upon everything which he has esteemed and trusted. It is difficult to describe the weariness, the fainting of heart, that comes with this discouraging revelation. The sun of life sets at noon ; the world is black with shadows. What a change is effected by the conviction that although

the prince of this world, whom he has worshipped, is doomed, hope need not be abandoned. Under the guidance of the great Helper, he turns for consolation to Jesus Christ. Believing in Him, loving Him, working for Him, marching under His banner, he finds himself experiencing a sense of the victoriousness of life. He has done with failure and defeat. As time passes, and the conviction that Christ is the Conqueror deepens, he is led into the tranquil waiting of the purified spirit for the manifestation of the King in His beauty.

The conviction that 'the prince of this world hath been judged' carries with it a suggestion that acted with decisive effect upon the people who were influenced by the Great Revival. 'The prince of this world!' Then there is another world in which our King lives in glory. It is no exaggeration to say that, through the preaching of the evangelists, there came such a revelation of eternity as had not been previously known in England. That revelation brought before the eyes scenes that were sombre and terrifying; but far above the regions of perpetual sorrow there shone the vision of a King who walked in the midst of His saints, and led them to fountains of living waters. Heaven was a city that had foundations. Its light relieved the darkness of days of disappointment, and of nights of anguish; its music softened the harshness of the world's discords; its open gates sent their perpetual welcome to the toil-worn soldiers of the King.

## 302 The Revival of Religion in England

In estimating the results of the Great Revival, it is essential that we should recognize the fact that it brought into striking prominence the meaning of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. By so doing it revolutionized the religious thought of the day, and sounded a note that must be prolonged throughout the ages if the Church is to be loyal to Christ. The explanation of the 'Mission of the Comforter' was not conveyed to the people solely by sermons and in private conversations. It was made the perpetual possession of the Churches by a mightier agency. In describing the Great Revival, we have dwelt, more especially, on the work of John Wesley; but we have been conscious all the time that his brother was standing by his side and sharing his work as an evangelist and teacher. The methods of the two men differed. John Wesley preached sermons which produced and still produce permanent effects, but thousands of them were spoken into the air. They served their high immediate purpose and were forgotten. Charles Wesley preached sermons; but he did something better, he wrote hymns. His hymns entered into the memory; they were conned and repeated in private until every phrase was familiar. Their music streamed along the humble pathways of common life. They were sung when men were 'at work'; when they sat quietly in their houses; when the soldiers of Christ girded on their armour; when the 'believer' watched, and prayed, and fought, and toiled for his King; when

the way was rough or bright with sunshine; when 'in a hurry of business,' and in the hush that comes with the approach of death. On all these occasions Charles Wesley found words that they could repeat and sing, or to which they could listen as their friends clustered around them when the hour of their departure was nigh. All who remember the men and women of sixty years ago who preserved so much of the old Methodist spirit, will call to mind the treasured hymn-book that they carried with such reverence to the class-meeting, the love-feast, and the public service. Some of these ancients knew every hymn, and could break out into quotations that illustrated the changing phases of their religious experience. The hymns were their organ of expression; they enabled them to explain what they felt of the power and the love of God.

Charles Wesley's hymns convey clear and decisive teaching on the subjects of sin, righteousness, and judgement. The exceeding sinfulness of sin is set forth in uncompromising language; the perfect righteousness of Jesus is displayed, and the eyes of the believer are fixed upon His infinite purity and beauty; the note of victory over the world rings out like a trumpet-blast in the ears of the 'soldiers of Christ'; there is the wail over the impenitent sinner's doom, and the joyous cry that springs to the lips when the sky is opened, and 'the world of spirits bright' is seen. If we could point to no other result of the Great Revival, then, in Charles Wesley's hymns, we could



## 304 The Revival of Religion in England

show that it brought to the Churches of England a revelation of 'a new heaven and a new earth.'

The Great Revival produced a new type of gospel minister, and brought into prominence evangelical doctrines which had been hidden by ages of neglect. In addition, it revealed a distinct and unfamiliar type of Christian character. It is true that the ideal 'Methodist' might easily have been discovered in the New Testament, but in the eighteenth century religious people were disinclined to believe that Christian character had to be conformed to the example set by men and women who lived in Apostolic times. John Wesley went back to the purest, brightest ages of the Church, and insisted that the graces which then beautified the 'saints' must still distinguish the children of God.

In a pamphlet which John Wesley published in 1745 we see the ideal of character towards which he worked. It is entitled *Advice to the People called Methodists*. In describing the Methodists, he says that they are a people who profess to pursue holiness of heart and life—that is, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God; they place religion

in a uniform resemblance of the great Object of it; in a steady imitation of Him they worship, in all His imitable perfections; more particularly in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart and governing the life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. viii. p. 352, 8vo ed.

He then goes on to say—

If you walk by this rule, continually endeavouring to know and love and resemble and obey the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the God of love, of pardoning mercy ; if from this principle of loving, obedient faith, you carefully abstain from all evil, and labour, as you have opportunity, to do good to all men, friends or enemies ; if, lastly, you unite together to encourage and help each other in thus working out your salvation, and for that end watch over one another in love, you are they whom I mean by Methodists.<sup>1</sup>

Having described the people whom he addresses, Wesley proceeds to give them advice. As we read between the lines of his counsels, his ideal of the Methodist comes out with great distinctness. In his pamphlet he reminded his readers that they were ‘a new people.’ Their name was new ; so were their principles, at least in this respect, that

possibly not in the Christian world was there any other set of people who so strenuously and continually insisted on the absolute necessity of universal holiness both in heart and life ; of a peaceful and joyous love of God ; of a supernatural evidence of things not seen ; of an inward witness that they were the children of God ; and of the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, in order to any good thought, or word, or work.

He then indicates a fact which distinguished them from all other Christian people. He says—

<sup>1</sup> p. 353.

## 306 The Revival of Religion in England

There is no other set of people, at least, not visibly united together, who lay so much and yet no more stress than you do on rectitude of opinions, on outward modes of worship, and the use of those ordinances which you acknowledge to be of God. So much stress you lay even on right opinions, as to profess, that you earnestly desire to have a right judgement in all things, and are glad to use every means which you know or believe may be conducive thereto ; and yet not so much as to condemn any man upon earth, merely for thinking otherwise than you do ; much less, to imagine that God condemns him for this, if he be upright and sincere of heart. On those outward modes of worship, wherein you have been bred up, you lay so much stress as highly to approve them, but not so much as to lessen your love to those who conscientiously dissent from you herein. You likewise lay so much stress on the use of those ordinances which you believe to be of God, as to confess there is no salvation for you if you wilfully neglect them : And yet you do not judge them that are otherwise minded ; you determine nothing concerning those who, not believing those ordinances to be of God, do, out of principle, abstain from them.<sup>1</sup>

In his *Advice* to them, Wesley also points out that the Methodists were distinguished as a 'new people' by the strictness of their life. They made it a rule to abstain from fashionable diversions, from reading plays, romances, or books of humour, from singing innocent songs, or talking in a merry, gay, diverting manner ; they dressed plainly ; they were honest in their manner of trade ; they were exact in observing the Lord's Day ; they were scrupulous as to things that had not paid

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. viii. pp. 353, 354, 8vo ed.

custom ; they totally abstained from spirituous liquors, unless in cases of necessity ; and they were governed by the rule ‘not to mention the fault of an absent person, in particular of ministers or of those in authority.’

After pointing out that the principles and practices of the Methodists must bring persecution upon them, Wesley gives them this exhortation—

Keep in the very path wherein you now tread. Be true to your principles. Never rest again in the dead formality of religion. Pursue with your might inward and outward holiness ; a steady imitation of Him you worship ; a still increasing resemblance of His imitable perfections ; His justice, mercy, and truth. Let this be your manly, noble, generous religion, equally remote from the meanness of superstition, which places religion in doing what God hath not enjoined, or abstaining from what He hath not forbidden ; and from the unkindness of bigotry, which confines our affection to our own party, sect, or opinion. . . . Carefully avoid enthusiasm : Impute not the dreams of men to the all-wise God ; and expect neither light nor power from Him, but in the serious use of all the means He hath ordained. Be true also to your principles touching opinions and the externals of religion. Use every ordinance which you believe is of God ; but beware of narrowness of spirit towards those who use them not. Conform yourselves to those modes of worship which you approve ; yet love as brethren those who cannot conform. Lay so much stress on opinions, that all your own, if it be possible, may agree with truth and reason ; but have a care of anger, dislike, or contempt towards those whose opinions differ from yours. . . . Condemn no man for not thinking as you think. Let every one enjoy the full and free liberty of



## 308 The Revival of Religion in England

thinking for himself. Let every man use his own judgement, since every man must give an account of himself to God. Abhor every approach, in any kind or degree, to the spirit of persecution. If you cannot reason or persuade a man into the truth, never attempt to force him into it. If love will not compel him to come in, leave him to God, the Judge of all.<sup>1</sup>

In reading Wesley's *Advice to the People called Methodists*, we seem to be breathing an ampler, purer air. We instinctively adopt his words, and admit that the religion he describes is 'manly, noble, and generous.' We have no doubt that in the England of the eighteenth century there were persons, untouched by Methodism, who would have recognized that the 'principles' and 'practices' described in the *Advice* were in accordance with the right view of the Christian life. We may go further and say that, in all the Churches of the time, men and women could be found who exemplified these principles and practices in their lives. But they were a dispersed people, knowing little or nothing of one another. They quietly trimmed the golden lamps of personal piety, and shed a radiance over their own narrow sphere. The peculiarity of Methodism was that it gathered together into the United Societies those who accepted the teaching of Wesley, and made it the rule of their life. The lamps were clustered, and the concentrated light shone out upon the darkness of the world.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. viii. p. 357, 8vo ed.

The unification of the Methodists produced distinct effects upon the cities, towns, and villages of this country in the eighteenth century. At first the strangeness of their doctrine, character, and conduct irritated those who could not understand them, and enraged those who were reprov'd by their sobriety, purity, and loving-kindness. But, in process of time, the eyes of the people of England grew accustomed to the new light. It was welcomed, and persecution ceased. At this distance of time it seems remarkable that people who professed and practised the principles of the Methodists should have been assailed so bitterly. But the instinct which makes most of us hate and assault the peculiar displayed itself with exceptional force in the days of which we write. Gradually the enmity against Wesley and the members of his Societies was modified, and, among men specially gifted with reason, it disappeared.

One of the most striking results of the Great Revival was the creation of a new Church in England. Much discussion has circled round this fact. It is asserted that John Wesley never considered that the 'United Societies' were a Church, and that he never intended that they should become a Church. As a matter of fact, he not only calls them a Church, but he made careful arrangements for their ecclesiastical organization. After much hesitation, he was, finally, persuaded that they were destined to stand apart from all other Churches and to pursue their own

## 310 The Revival of Religion in England

independent career. We presume that certain controversialists will continue to debate these questions; but the discussion has ceased to have any practical value.

When we perceive the relation of the 'United Societies' to the Churches of the eighteenth century, we see that it was inevitable that they should occupy an independent position. The testimony of Canon Overton is decisive on the question of the relation of the Societies to the Church of England. As organizations they never were included in the State Church. John Wesley dreamed of the possibility of inducing the bishops and the clergy to interest themselves in his work and to accept the responsibility of governing and caring for his Societies, but rude facts disturbed and ended his musings. Professor Gwatkin says that Wesley possessed 'one of the sanest minds of the eighteenth century.'<sup>1</sup> The estimate is true. His practical sagacity was shown by his acceptance of the inevitable. He saw that the Church of England and his Societies stood apart, and that no golden bridge could span the abyss that divided them.

There were two forces that might have knit the Societies to the Established Church in the eighteenth century—the forces of mutual understanding and sympathy. But they did not exist. The mass of Churchmen had no insight into the spirit and aims of Methodism. The evangelical doctrines concerning sin

<sup>1</sup> *The Knowledge of God*, vol. ii. p. 242.

and its forgiveness were strongly resented by the laity and clergy of the Establishment. Dr. Samuel Johnson will be accepted as a favourable example of the religious layman of his time. We have seen his singularly crude criticism of Whitefield, and from it we may judge his capacity to understand Methodism. But that criticism does not stand alone. Boswell records an incident which casts a glaring light upon Johnson's ignorance of evangelical religion. He tells us that two girls who had come under the influence of Methodism, and had been touched with a new 'seriousness,' visited Johnson in his rooms. He was distressed with the change. Consumed with anxiety to chase away their sobriety, he took them on his knees and tried to blandish their 'Methodism' out of them. It is a grotesque picture; but it is a revelation not only of Johnson, but also of the spirit of that distracted and dreary day. If we turn from the laity to the clergy, we find in most of them an absolute inability to understand Methodist teaching and experience. It is pathetic to watch the helpless astonishment of the parish ministers when confronted by a case of 'conviction in respect of sin.' They saw that the sorrow was genuine, but their only solution of the mystery was that it sprang from physical causes, or was the result of temporary mental derangement. When Jean de Quetteville, so well known afterwards as an evangelist in the Channel Islands, 'opened his mind' to his parish minister, he was gravely advised



## 312 The Revival of Religion in England

to try the effect of sea-bathing and of dancing with the girls. The readers of Methodist biographies are familiar with similar prescriptions which were commended to men and women who were distressed with a consciousness of personal sin. These suggestions revealed astounding ignorance of the work of the Spirit of God. It was impossible that Wesley could entrust the care of his Societies to such advisers.

But there was another obstacle in the way of the union of the Methodists with the Church of England. Not only was there an absence of spiritual perception in the minds of the parish ministers, but sympathy, that clear revealer of the meaning of things, was, in the great majority of clergymen, entirely lacking. If the ministers had confessed their inability to grasp the meaning of repentance and salvation by faith, and left the Methodists to pursue their own course as a misguided and incomprehensible people, many dark pages in the history of religion in England would not have been written. Instead of 'refraining from these men,' the clergy attacked them with an almost inconceivable bitterness. In Wesley's *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, he shows how he and his people were treated by some of the parish ministers. Speaking of the ministers who had turned so many from sin to holiness, he says that the greater part of the clergy, instead of receiving them with open arms, spoke of them as if the devil, not God, had sent them. Then he proceeds—

Some repelled them from the Lord's Table; others stirred up the people against them, representing them, even in their public discourses, as fellows not fit to live, Papists, heretics, traitors, conspirators against their king and country. And how did they watch over the sinners lately reformed? Even as a leopard watcheth over his prey. They drove some of them also from the Lord's Table, to which till now they had no desire to approach. They preached all manner of evil concerning them, openly cursing them in the name of the Lord. They turned many out of their work, persuaded others to do so too, and harassed them all manner of ways.<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of understanding and sympathy, how was it possible that the Methodist Societies could deliver themselves up to be absorbed by the Church of England? Common sense forbade such a sacrifice, and its counsels prevailed.

If it is not possible to find the conditions favourable to permanent union of the Methodist Societies with the Established Church, are such conditions to be discovered among the Dissenters of the period? The answer will be on the lips of every man who has studied the history of the eighteenth century. It is enough to refer to the incident concerning Dr. Doddridge which we have recorded, and to the statements contained in Dr. Dale's *History of English Congregationalism*, to show that most of the principal representatives of the Dissenters were out of sympathy with the Methodists. There was no *rapprochement* between them. The lack of

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. viii. pp. 223, 224, 8vo ed.

### 314 The Revival of Religion in England

sympathy was not displayed in the energetic fashions adopted by the hostile clergy, but it showed itself decisively, and it made a union between the Methodists and the Dissenters impossible.

Unwelcome to the Church of England and to the Dissenters, the Societies were isolated. They were not only unwelcome, they were repelled. That repulsion effected a beneficent result. Pressed from all sides, they were massed together; and, at last, they stood out as a well-organized and fully equipped Church, charged with a unique mission, and sent out by the Spirit of God to accomplish a specific work in the nation and the world.

The organization of the Methodist Church is supposed to be a triumph of ecclesiastical statesmanship. The constructive genius of Wesley has been lauded, and he has been compared with famous constitution-builders and legislators. He would have been surprised with the eulogium. In his own opinion he was not a creative statesman, but an unconscious imitator of the work of other men. His arrangements had all been anticipated. The pattern to which his Societies were unconsciously conformed was contained in the New Testament. Without any previous design, he met 'occasions as they arose,' and, in the end, he created a Church founded on the lines laid down in Apostolic times. Unfettered by theory, and unhampered by plan, he did the day's work and provided for its needs. The result shows that he was guided by the

Spirit of God. He formed a Church after the Pentecostal pattern, a Church that existed to accomplish a moral and spiritual purpose; a Church that, having recovered the meaning of the New Covenant, witnessed to the world that it is through the forgiveness of sins that men pass into the light and gladness of the kingdom of heaven.

If we compare the Methodist Church of the eighteenth century with its Apostolic type, we shall find many resemblances. It is only necessary to indicate a few of them. In his *Hymns on the Acts of the Apostles*,<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley speaks of the Apostolic Church as 'the Church of pardoned sinners.' That is a true description. The Acts of the Apostles shows that Jeremiah's words concerning the New Covenant found abundant illustration in those great days of missionary preaching. And the new Methodist Church, founded on the old model, was loyal to the ancient doctrines, and was the meeting-place of myriads of people who rejoiced in the forgiveness of their sins, and shone with the graces which beautified the saints of Apostolic days.

The Methodist Church answered to the Apostolic type in doctrine and experience. But it rendered an invaluable service to religion by recovering the old ideal of Christian fellowship. Those who have studied the organization of the Church in Apostolic and sub-Apostolic times are aware that fellowship determined

<sup>1</sup> *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, vol. xii. pp. 134-456.



## 316 The Revival of Religion in England

Church membership. The opportunity for demonstrating that fellowship was, more especially, provided by the weekly assemblies in which the lovefeast was celebrated, and in which the Eucharist closed the solemn and significant church meeting. The 'assembling together' was essential to Church membership. The Early Church knew nothing of men and women who claimed to be Christians, but who refrained from close association with the Church. Communion with the invisible Christ and fellowship with the members of the visible Church were the two essential points which distinguished a man as a Christian. In the little towns and villages where scattered converts lived, small assemblies met and acknowledged their union with each other and with the Christian Church throughout the world. Their common meal proclaimed their unity; much more did the words they uttered at the Eucharistic feast. When they spoke of the seed-corn that had been scattered on the mountains and then gathered together into one loaf, they looked upon the symbol of the Body of Christ, and rejoiced in their fellowship with the Church in all lands as well as with each other and with their living Lord. The Christian Societies of the Apostolic age were 'united Societies.' When the feeling of fellowship became weak in a man's heart, and he neglected the meetings of the Christian Church, he practically excommunicated himself. He was a withered branch cut off from the vine. In the Apostolic Church the idea and

the fact of fellowship occupied positions of supreme importance.

In the eighteenth century the convictions and practices of the Early Church revived. Surrounded by a hostile world, the Methodist people found sympathy and inspiration in their own Societies. The class-meeting, the band-meeting, the lovefeasts provided the occasion for communion with each other, and, where it was possible, they came to the Table of the Lord and rejoiced as they celebrated the death by which they lived. Gradually there sprang up in England a Church that has become remarkable for its unity. To this hour the comradeship of the Methodist people excites the wonder of the Churches. In Christ they form one family; they are knit together in love. This extraordinary unity manifests the fact that the spirit of the best years of the Apostolic Church has found expression in modern times.

The 'United Societies' were a restored picture of the Apostolic Church in the matters of doctrine, experience, and fellowship. They also reproduced those scenes of activity which are displayed in the New Testament, and are revealed by the records of the sub-Apostolic Church. The 'apostles,' 'prophets,' 'evangelists,' and 'teachers' reappeared, carrying with them the gospel message, and hastening from place to place to publish glad tidings of great joy. The wisdom of Wesley was shown not only in his employment of itinerant preachers, but also in the use he made of the

## 318 The Revival of Religion in England

men and women who, settled in their respective towns and villages, cared for the classes, and sought the salvation of their neighbours. That wisdom was even more clearly manifested when he placed the responsibility of Christian work upon every member of his Societies. We have seen that Charles Wesley described the Apostolic Church as 'a Church of pardoned sinners,' but he amplified the description and said that it was a Church of 'practical believers.' The phrase has been altered in recent times to 'justified believers.' The change is not an improvement. It misses one of the outstanding features of the Apostolic Church. And that feature came out again in the experiences of the members of the 'United Societies.' We are accustomed to speak of the Great Revival as the work of John Wesley and of the evangelists who shared his toils. We have no wish to minimize the importance of that work, but it is evident that, while an itinerant evangelist may found a Church, he can never consolidate it. The 'practical believers' in the towns which have been awakened by the call to repentance have to do that work. They did it in the eighteenth century. When we read the local histories of Methodism, and watch the building up of prosperous Societies, we are reminded of Harnack's words, 'It was characteristic of this religion that every one who seriously confessed the faith proved of service to its propaganda.'<sup>1</sup> Having received the light, they let it shine before men. They

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 35.

trimmed the lamp and put it on the stand in their own house, and they carried it also to the houses of their neighbours. Everywhere its light shone before men. As it was in the ancient days, so it was in the times of the Great Revival. The success of the Church did not depend so much upon its preachers as upon the Christian character, the steady influence, and the loving work of its members.

The Great Revival produced a new Church; it also did much to make England a new nation. Those who have studied the problem of the social, moral, and religious progress of the English people are agreed that, in the eighteenth century, this country experienced a renaissance. The change has been attributed to various causes. Those who remember that 'the roots of the present lie deep in the past' will take care to note the connexion between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, and will not forget the relation between Methodism and Puritanism. We readily consent to the statement of John Richard Green, that Puritanism

wrought out through Wesley and the revival of the eighteenth century the work of religious reform which its earlier efforts had thrown back for a hundred years. Slowly but steadily it introduced its own seriousness and purity into English society, English literature, English politics. The history of English progress since the Restoration, on its moral and spiritual sides, has been the history of Puritanism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *History of the English People*, vol. iii. p. 322.



## 320 The Revival of Religion in England

Some persons, adopting a more superficial theory, see, in the renaissance of the eighteenth century, the effects of a less remote cause, the French Revolution. This suggestion is so interesting that it may well detain us for a few moments. There can be no doubt that the Revolution did much to dislocate and overturn the social system of France. The people who had been oppressed asserted their rights, emerged from obscurity, attacked the 'upper classes' pike in hand, and manifested their strength in the days of terror. The watchwords, 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,' were flung into the air. They acquired a new meaning, and shone with a light that spread far beyond the borders of France. The earthquake shocks of the Revolution were felt in England, and stirred the nation from its slumbers. The mind of the English people awoke to the need of political and social reforms, and a general consent was given to the truth of Burke's declaration—

A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve.

Attracted by the theory that the renaissance of England was produced by the French Revolution, some have pointed out that the influence of that great event found expression in the literature of the period, and that the poems and books that were then written

were filled with ideas that changed the spirit of the age. Especially is it held that Wordsworth, and those who sang with him in that great hour, revolutionized English society. The theory attracts those who have yielded to the fascination of the 'lake' poets. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the population was split up into fragments. There was little, if any, sympathy between the upper and the lower classes. We are told that Wordsworth discovered the value of the individual, and that he compelled men of all ranks to recognize the worth and importance of the peasant and the poor. In addition, it is asserted that he produced the renaissance by rousing the sense of wonder in the minds of prosaic and practical English people. A light that never was on land or sea shone round about them, and they suddenly awoke to find themselves in a mysterious and transcendently lovely world. We eagerly acknowledge the value of Wordsworth's work. In its own time and sphere it exercised a profound influence; but we cannot attribute to him and his fellow singers the renaissance of England.

It must be remembered that long before the French Revolution convulsed the world, and long before Wordsworth sang of the beauty of lowly life and the wonder of the universe, John Wesley had preached the doctrines which lead to the emancipation of the minds and the souls of men. He began his evangelistic career fifty years before the critical

## 322 The Revival of Religion in England

dates of the French Revolution. The truths which were vindicated by that upheaval of French society had been taught, quietly and effectually, by the preachers of the Revival. If Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are words that express the ideas that revolutionize a nation, then their force had been felt in England long before the men of the 'Terror' wrote them in letters of blood. John Wesley, as he wandered over the country, instilled the truths concerning the freedom, the equality, and the brotherhood of men into the minds of the people. He taught that a man should be free to do what he ought to do. He insisted that ignorance and sin are the enslavers of the soul and the spirit, and he struck vigorous and deadly blows at these oppressors. By his pamphlets, his schools, and his care for the children, he assailed the ignorance that blinded the people. He made them think, and thinking is the sworn foe of all kinds of tyranny. He made them think broadly and deeply, not so much about their own rights as about the rights of others. But he went further. By his teaching concerning the forgiveness of sins and the possibility of holiness, he created in the minds of multitudes of Englishmen the true conception of liberty. Far above all social and political freedom he placed the liberty that comes to the man who flies to Christ for salvation.

Those who keenly watch the variations of English thought in the eighteenth century are struck with the progress of the idea of equality among all classes. It

has been said that, at a certain period of the century, 'all ranks of society recognized, or had a passionate desire to recognize, the equality of every living being before Almighty God,' and that 'this was largely due to the preaching, the fervour, and the faith of the Methodist preachers like Whitefield and Wesley.' It is certain that something did, then, occur in the eighteenth century which altered the estimate of men concerning each other, and placed them on one platform in the light of the divine justice and love. Searching the age for an adequate cause of this change in the method of assessing human values, we find it in the Evangelical Revival. The Duchess of Buckingham's objection that it was monstrous to be told 'that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth' was natural, and was shared by her contemporaries. But in process of time its strength waned, and now we presume there is no one who would venture to urge it. But the Duchess was unnecessarily alarmed. The preachers of the Great Revival never made the attempt to destroy social distinctions and to drag men down to one level. They insisted that men were equally sinful, but they pointed upward to the heights of moral and spiritual elevation, and showed that the pathways to the summit are not closed to any one because of his social condition, that they may be travelled by every one who believes in the Name of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of the equal spiritual value of the



## 324 The Revival of Religion in England

individual is fatal to the evils which were so conspicuous in English society during the time of the Great Revival. When accepted, it compels a nation to face and to remove social and legislative injustice, and all the conditions that produce misery among the labouring classes and the poor. If our description of the state of this country in the eighteenth century is again read, it will be seen that the evils which existed in those dreary days arose, in great part, from the fact that men cared little about each other, and were contemptuous of the common rights of man. Gradually the indifference began to disappear. Among the nobler spirits, who are ever the saviours of society, it ceased. Then the doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God steadily advanced, and with it there sprang up the light which still shines upon the great questions that concern the social, moral, and religious welfare of the English people.

It is not necessary to insist, at any length, upon the notorious fact that the Great Revival brought the doctrine of the brotherhood of man into prominence. It was constantly taught by the evangelists; the 'United Societies' illustrated the fact that those who are the sons of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, are brothers, bound together in affection, and pledged to mutual help. If the 'Rules of the Society' are studied, it will be seen that they strikingly illustrate the principle of fraternity. It will be enough to note one fact. Wesley's mind was constantly exercised concerning

the condition of the poor. He relieved their sufferings with a liberality which would now be condemned by every political economist. But he did something better than scattering alms among them. When times were hard, and work was scarce, he was ingenious in inventing methods for their employment. But it was impossible for him to fight the poverty of the nation. That battle is still being waged, and as yet there is no sign of victory. Foiled in his attempts to deal on a large scale with the poverty of the people, Wesley resolved that he would systematize the relief of the poor so far as the 'United Societies' were concerned. Following the example of the Apostolic Church, stewards were appointed to consider and supply their needs. Schools were built for their children, widows and orphans found 'a harbour of refuge' in some of the preaching-houses, and Wesley incessantly exhorted his people to stand by each other in the fierce battle of life. Through the influence of the Great Revival a new spirit of fraternity arose in England. It still finds high expression in the Methodist Societies; it has made them the exponents of the meaning of brotherhood to the whole world.

We have, then, no hesitation in affirming our conviction that the Great Revival was the cause of the renaissance of England in the eighteenth century. The nation was born again, and born from above. Picturing to ourselves that wonderful transformation, we do not forget the human workers, but their figures fade as we

## 326 The Revival of Religion in England

become conscious of the presence and power of the Divine Agent who secured all their success. It was a time of the pouring out of the Spirit from on high. Wandering through the dusty deserts of those far-off years, we often ask ourselves how they were made to live. Here and there we see a few springs of living water, but the winds blow, and the hot sands, shifting restlessly, fill the air. It was not the coming of a man that turned the wilderness into 'the garden of the Lord.' It was the rising of a river that rolled out from a hidden, celestial source. That river, bright as crystal, proceeded out of the throne of God and the Lamb. It flowed irresistibly from the deep fountains of eternity, it filled this land, it spread into the waste places of the earth. That is the secret of the coming of the Great Revival. Discerning this fact, we lift up our eyes to heaven with gratitude and hope. We are thankful for the flooding out of the Spirit's influences in the days of our fathers. But deep down in our heart there lives a hope that in our own days those influences will again refresh us. Let us not put aside our study of the Great Revival with the thought that it was an event which cannot be repeated. If, adopting the methods suitable to our own age, we will preach and work as Wesley did, our toil will be honoured by the Holy Ghost. Once more the river will roll from its heavenly fountains, and 'everything shall live - whithersoever the river cometh.'

## INDEX

Absolution, 13-16  
 Act of Uniformity, 117  
 Addison, 57, 76  
 Adherents of Methodist Churches, 274  
*Advice to the People called Methodists*, 304-8  
 Alleine, Joseph, 115  
 America, Revivals in, 135  
 Amusements, 75-86, 153, 306  
 Apostles in Early Church, 31, 292  
 Apostolic teaching, Revival of, 293  
 Arianism, 108, 119  
*Articles of Religion*, 195  
  
 Bands, 233  
 Baptismal Regeneration, 17, 154-6  
 Baptists, 120, 121  
 Bath, 232  
 Baxter, Richard, 115  
 Bear-baiting, 85  
 Benson, Dr., 152, 159  
 Birmingham, 47  
 Birstall, 245  
 Bishops in Early Church, 33  
 Blackheath, 238  
 Böhler, Peter, 185-8, 191  
*Book of Homilies*, 196-8, 222  
 Bradbury, Thomas, 121  
 Bristol, 48, 159, 161, 202-18, 231, 252, 267  
 Buckingham, Duchess of, 275, 323  
 Bull-baiting, 85

Burke, Edmund, 70, 320  
 Butler, Dr., 207  
  
*Calamy's Ejected Ministers*, 116  
 Carey, William, 274  
 Carlyle, Thomas, 97  
 Cartwright, Thomas, 114  
 Cennick, John, 249-51  
 Character of clergy, 99, 291  
 Character of Methodists, 304-8  
 Charles II, 102, 103, 112, 117, 128  
 Christian Perfection, 298  
 Church and State, 37  
 Church, the Methodist, 309-19  
 Circulating Schools, 135, 240  
 Classes, 252, 270, 271  
 Cock-fighting, 83-5  
 Congregationalists, 120, 121, 234  
 Constantine, 37  
 Conversation Classes, 270  
 Conversion, 193, 194  
 Cornwall, 263-72  
 Crawshaw, Mr. E., 225  
 Criminals, 62  
  
 Dagge, Mr., 202  
 Dale, Dr. R. W., 283-7, 313  
 Davies, Howell, 148  
 Dawn of the Revival in England, 150-99  
 Dawn of the Revival in Wales, 132-49  
 Deacons in Early Church, 33



Defoe, Daniel, 266

Deistic controversy, 97, 256

*Directory*, the, 115

Dissenters, 110, 163, 283-7, 313

Dobschütz, Ernst von, 26

Doddridge, Dr., 286

Drunkenness, 89-93

Dummer, 157

Edgeworth, Miss, 80

Edwards, Jonathan, 135

Evangelical Party in Church of  
England, 278-82

Executions, 64, 65

Experience, the testimony of,  
188

Faith, saving, 178-81, 185-99

*Farther Appeal to Men of Reason  
and Religion*, 312

Fellowship, 254, 315

Fetter Lane Society, 183, 200,  
210, 217, 237, 238, 244, 253

Field-preaching, 204, 206, 208,  
209, 210, 212-19, 224, 227-9,  
232

Foster, Rev. H. J., 215, 218

Foundery, the, 242-4

Fox, Charles James, 81

Franklin, Dr., 62

French Revolution, 320

Fry, Mrs. Elizabeth, 72

Gaming, 81-3

Georgia, 158, 165, 177, 178,  
241

Garrick, David, 75, 76, 79

Germany, Wesley's visit to, 191

Gift of the Spirit, 40-2, 326

Gifts of the Spirit, 39

Gladstone, Mr. W. E., 7, 282

Gloucester, 152, 159

Godly Club, the, 167-77

Green, John Richard, 319

Green, Rev. R., 165

Greville, Mrs., 160, 211, 216, 234

Harnack, Dr., 26, 28, 35

Harris, Howell, 139-47, 225, 239

Harris, Sampson, 161

Hartshorne's *Memoirs of a Royal  
Chaplain*, 106, 109

Heywood, Oliver, 116

Hoadly, Bishop, 109

Hoadly, John, 109

Hogarth, William, 83, 92

Holiness, 187, 296-8

*Homily of Justification*, 196-8

Hooker, Richard, 114

Horneck, Dr. Andrew, 125, 175

Howard, John, 70-2

Humphreys, Joseph, 251

Huntingdon, Countess of, 275, 277

Hutton, James, 182, 183, 190,  
232, 233

Hutton, John, 181, 184, 185

*Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à  
Kempis's, 28, 298

Influence of Methodism on  
Church of England, 276

Instantaneous conversion, 187,  
193, 284

Islington Church, 225, 226

*Jackson's Life of Charles Wesley*,  
268

James II, 102, 104, 128, 275

Jeffrey, Lord, 80

Johnson, Dr. S., 58, 67, 97, 203,  
230, 311

Jones, Griffith, 135, 136, 232

Ken, Bishop, 103

Kennington Common, 228, 239,  
242

Kinchin, Charles, 157

King and Church, the, 101

- Kingsley, Charles, 1  
Kingswood, 204-6, 208, 214, 240, 244, 249
- Lancashire, 47  
Latimer's *Annals of Bristol*, 63, 71, 84  
Law, William, 167-74  
Lay Preachers, 249-51, 269, 292  
Leaders, Class, 252  
Lecky, W. E. H., 76, 89, 266  
Liberty, equality, fraternity, 320  
*Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, 293  
London, population of, 46  
Lord's Supper, the, 19  
Luther, Martin, 299
- Macaulay, Lord, 45  
Membership of the Methodist Churches, 274  
Methodism and the aristocracy, 277  
Methodism and the Church of England, 132-4, 276, 310  
Methodists, 168  
Milton, John, 166, 167  
Minerva Press, 79  
Missionary Societies, 274  
Mob, the English, 87, 257-63  
Moorfields, 227-9, 239, 242  
Moral condition of England, 74-95  
Moravians, the, 178, 200, 233  
Morgan, William, 170
- Neal's *History of the Puritans*, 115  
Nettleton Court, Religious Society in, 183, 190, 192  
New Birth, the, 155, 182, 184  
Newcastle-on-Tyne, 245-8, 253  
Newman, John Henry, 23  
Newspapers, 164  
Newton, Bishop, 104, 105
- Newton, John, 280  
Nicknames, 168, 175  
Nonconformists, 111  
Non-jurors, the, 104  
Novels, 79  
Numerical results of Revival, 274
- Oglethorpe, General, 68, 161  
Opinions, 220  
Orthodoxy, 220-3  
Overton, Canon, 80, 99, 104, 132, 276, 281  
Oxford, 150, 167-77, 185, 241  
Oxford, Bishop of, 170
- Pattison, Mark, 95  
Peirce, James, 120, 122  
Pitt, William, 82  
Plumptre, Dean, 6  
Politics and the Church, 99, 283  
Population of England, 45, 46  
Portraits of John Wesley, 165  
Poverty, 59-62, 325  
Preaching-houses, 236, 242, 247, 248  
Preferment-hunting, 103-10, 291  
Presbyterians, the, 112, 114-23  
Presbyters in Early Church, 33  
Prisons, 68-72  
Prize-fighting, 86  
*Proceedings of Wesley Historical Society*, 166, 218, 226, 267  
Prophets in Early Church, 32, 292  
Pugh, Philip, 137  
Pyle, Dr. Edmund, 106
- Reformation, the, 100  
Relation of United Societies to the Church of England, 132-4  
Religion, 1-43  
Religious condition of England, 96-123  
Religious Societies, the, 124-31, 153, 162, 182, 183, 204, 232, 234, 236, 254, 259, 268, 269

- Results of the Revival, some, 273-326  
 Revival in England, the, 200-72  
 Revival of religion, 42  
 Rigg, Dr., 133  
 Riots, 87  
 Roads, 50  
 Rogers, Professor, 46, 53, 61  
 Romaine, William, 280  
 Romilly, Sir Samuel, 63, 66  
 Romney's portrait of John Wesley, 165  
 Rowe, Rev. G. S., 165  
 Rowlands, Daniel, 136, 137, 181  
 Rules of the Society, 253
- Salter's Hall Conference, 121  
 Savage, Richard, 202  
 Savannah, Wesley's Society in, 177  
 Saving faith, 178-81, 185-99  
 Scenes, 234-36, 239  
 Schaff, Dr., 34, 36  
 Schools, 210, 240, 241, 248  
 Scott, Sir W., 80  
 Selwyn, Lady, 152  
 Separation from Church, 112  
*Sermon of the Salvation of Man-kind*, 196-98, 222  
 Seward, William, 204, 225  
 Shopkeepers, 56  
 Sidney's *Life of Walker*, 264, 270  
 Sin, righteousness, and judgment, 293-304  
 Skeats's *History of the Free Churches*, 120, 121, 122  
 Smithies, Mr., 125  
 Smuggling, 94, 265  
 Social condition of England, 44-73  
 Spangenberg, 179, 187  
 St. Andrew's, Holborn, 184  
 St. Ives, 267, 268  
 St. Margaret's, Westminster, 201, 202, 204  
 St. Paul's Cathedral, 189  
 Stage-coaches, 50
- Stamp, Dr., 247  
 Stanley, Dean, 21  
 State and Church, 37  
 State lotteries, 81  
 Stephen, Sir Leslie, 97  
 Stonehouse, 161  
 Stonehouse, George, 225  
 Sydney's *England and the English*, 48, 50, 58, 59, 76, 79, 80, 266
- Teachers in the Early Church, 33, 292  
*Teaching of the Twelve*, the, 19, 25, 31  
 Tennent, John, 135  
 Terrick, Dr., 281  
 Thackeray, W. M., 291  
 Theatres, 75-9  
 Travers, Walter, 114  
 Turner, Joseph, 267  
 Tyerman's *Life of Wesley*, 231, 243
- Unitarianism, 122  
 United Societies, the, 254, 309  
 Upper Classes, the, 57, 58
- Villages, 51
- Wages, 53-6  
 Walker, Samuel, 264, 269-72  
 Walker's *Sufferings of the Clergy*, 116  
 Wapping, 239  
 Watts, Dr., 286  
 Wendeborn's *View of England*, 59, 77, 78, 87, 94  
 Wesley, Charles, 158, 170, 182, 185, 188, 220, 241, 246, 271, 302  
 Wesley, John, 37, 39, 79, 88, 114, 153, 165-95, 231-72, 277, 287-92, 304-10, 312, 314  
 Wesley, Samuel, 171  
 Wesley, Samuel, junior, 182

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Westley, John, 116  | Wordsworth, William, 321 |
| Whitefield, George, 144, 151-65,<br>200-17, 225-31, 238, 275, 277   | Wrecking, 265            |
| Whitgift, Archbishop, 114   |                          |
| Wilberforce, William, 82  | Yorkshire, 47            |
| Williams's portrait of Wesley,<br>165                               | Young, Arthur, 50, 54    |
| Witness of the Spirit, 141, 187                                     | Young, Dr., 291          |
| Woodward's <i>Account of the Reli-<br/>gious Societies</i> , 125-31 | Zinzendorf, Count, 191   |



PRINTED BY  
WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,  
LONDON AND BECCLES.



299 2 Sawtooth Road



Green 310 Wesley's Sermon  
322 " Pamphlets. ✓

H. B  
4.4.83



